



# ANALYSIS OF THE PSYCHOLINGUISTIC BASIS OF TEACHING CHILDREN THEIR MOTHER TONGUE

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## ABSTRACT

*In relation to language teaching, developmental psycholinguistics and applied psycholinguistics play significant roles in formulating effective ways of teaching. Psycholinguistics theory covered the language development of humans, in accordance with humans physical and mental development. Mother Tongue Instruction has been a debatable issue since long. There may be two options in the medium of instruction: either to teach especially primary and preprimary schoolchildren in their own mother tongue or continue using second as the medium of instruction. This article tries to explore the perplexing debate in brief by analyzing the concept through different perspectives namely psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, cultural, and pedagogical.*

**KEYWORDS:** *psycholinguistics, physical and mental development, mother tongue, pedagogical.*

## DISCUSSION

Language is a powerful means of communication which has enabled us to be more developed in comparison to other creatures so far found in the world. It is “the principal means used by human beings to communicate with one another” (Comrie, 2005). It is that divine gift for human being, “species specific to man” (Britannica, 2005), that has enabled us to enjoy the pleasure available in the world. Many children speak a home language that differs from the language of instruction in education programs. Research confirms that children learn best in their mother tongue as a prelude to and complement of bilingual and multilingual education. Whether children successfully retain their mother tongue while acquiring additional languages depends on several interacting factors.

One having competence in only in his or her mother tongue is likely to lose many things as the world has been more interactive. One who has broader communicative horizon feels more comfort in the globalized world than the one who is confined to his own mother tongue. Linguistic & Cognitive Development Language is “a sign-system fulfilling the cognitive and communicative functions in the process of human activity” (Dictionary of Philosophy, 1984). Encarta (2006) defines the term “cognitive” as the process of acquiring knowledge by

the use of reasoning, intuition, or perception. One of the critical concerns of schooling is whether linguistic development determines the cognitive development of a child. There is a debate among applied linguist and educational psychologist on the issue, nonetheless, we can claim that if the former has a beneficial role for the development of latter than mother tongue instruction becomes a crucial topic for our discussion.

Many children speak a home language that differs from the language of instruction in education programs. Research confirms that children learn best in their mother tongue as a prelude to and complement of bilingual and multilingual education. Whether children successfully retain their mother tongue while acquiring additional languages depends on several interacting factors. Studies show that six to eight years of education in a language are necessary to develop the level of literacy and verbal proficiency required for academic achievement in secondary school. To retain their mother tongue, children whose first language is not the medium of instruction must have: (1) continued interaction with their family and community in their first language on increasingly complex topics that go beyond household matters; (2) ongoing formal instruction in their first language to develop reading and writing skills; and (3) exposure to positive parental attitudes



to maintaining the mother tongue, both as a marker of cultural identity and for certain instrumental purposes (e.g., success in the local economy or global trade).

One of the psycholinguist, Bruner, 1966 (as cited in Slobin, 1974) suggests that the school is a very important determiner of the use of language to facilitate cognitive growth. In school children must learn to use language in the absence of immediate context. There are strong evidences to support linguistic development as not autonomous but a subordinate process of cognitive development. The work of Piaget's school (as cited in Slobin 1974, page 114) strongly suggests that language more often reflects than determines cognitive development. The general finding has been that special linguistic training will be of no avail to a child unless his level of cognitive development has already reached the point at which it can embrace the relevant concepts represented by words. Mother tongue instruction may have two connotations: teaching mother tongue itself and imparting formal education in the first language of students. But while we talk about the mother tongue instruction we take the second meaning of the term.

According to psycholinguistic perspective, the language that a child acquires at first in a natural setting can be termed as mother tongue. According to Noam Chomsky (1951) all children do have equal degree of competence in their mother tongue and they are perfect in using it. According to Encyclopedia Britannica (2005), every physiologically and mentally normal person has learned the main structure and basic vocabulary of his mother tongue by the end of childhood. Krashen (1973) in his critical period hypothesis maintains that language learning becomes easier and faster at the earlier ages. The period from birth to 11 years is thought to be fertile than later years (a theory popularly known as lateralization). One of the argument on the basis of above logic is that why not to use this fertile age and opportune our children with learning one or more languages that has gained an international status. The child who learns more language in his childhood is likely to get more benefit in this multilingual world than his compatriots who has left monolingual. A child acquires his or her first language without any formal instruction, even without knowing himself/herself that he or she is learning language.

Various researches have figured out that mother tongue instruction has positive influence in cognitive and linguistic development of children. Though the psycholinguistic perspective seems to support foreign language instruction as it bears some fruits because the students can learn second language easily at earlier stages looking through other perspectives it seems that mother tongue instruction is the best means of imparting education at primary level.

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