

Multilingualism in Children: Communicative Competence as a Socialization Pattern

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Abstract

Children show tremendous abilities in their language acquisition and language use. The current research reports the patterns in the language use of Arya,¹ a four-year-old, female, neurologically healthy, multilingual child in India.² A subjective report based on the observations of conversations in person and over phone calls obtained over a span of more than two and half years suggests that, in cross-cultural settings, multilingual children display communicative competence in their language use without any special instructions, provided they are exposed to the optimum amount of linguistic exposure. This research argues that children use their communicative competence as a socialization pattern to identify themselves with kith and kin. The research also hints at the future scope in pedagogy in general and in creating language teaching models, in particular.

Keywords: Multilingualism in children, communicative competence, language use, sociolinguistics

1. Introduction

A child is said to be a 'Language Acquisition Device' (LAD) and a 'Little intellectual marvel' whose capacities in learning and using a language should not be underestimated.³ Several studies in psycholinguistics have argued that an average, neurologically healthy child, in a natural environment, can acquire her native tongue by the age of two years, without any special instructions or deliberate efforts. All the child need is sufficient language data that would work as an environmental stimulus triggering the language development in children.

Going beyond the language acquisition system in children, the current report focuses on the actual language use or linguistic performance of a four-year-old female child in India.

¹ The original name of a child has been changed to maintain confidentiality.

² As this study is being reported (the late 2020s), the child has turned six years and started using more complex, coherent, and logical sentences and adheres to the four Gricean maxims of conversation. Some of these observations will be reported in the next series of the research titled 'Multilingualism in Children- 2: Sources of Word-Meaning Acquisition'.

³ See Steinberg et.al (2006, p. 36) and Fernández et.al (2011, p. 99).

The study displays the ability of Arya in using five different languages in different environmental settings. It will be argued that children use their capacity to use appropriate language in different situations as a socialization pattern. Their decision in language use adheres to their convergence behaviour, that is, their attempt in identifying themselves with the audience during a speech act. This intricate manoeuvre on their part is being accomplished without any deliberate teaching. The next section on literature review fashions the *cortège* for the argument of this paper.

2. Literature Review

An abundant amount of literature has been devoted to many stages of language development in children such as children's crying, its pitch and intonation, responding to the messages using sounds, babbling, one-word utterances or *holophrases*, the process of word meaning acquisition, language development in deaf and mute children, language acquisition among wild and isolated children that have grown up without any human intervention, early bilingualism and its effect on the native language and other cognitive abilities, language fluency, etc.

In 1965 it is proposed by Noam Chomsky,⁴ a young US structural linguist and cognitive scientist, that a child has an innate universal grammar that helps in acquiring any language despite having less linguistic exposure.⁵ It is known as a Universal Grammar (UG) theory. Chomsky drew a classic distinction between linguistic competence and linguistic performance, where the former refers to the speaker-listener's innate or tacit knowledge of language structure, while the latter refers to the language use in a particular situation (Chomsky, 1965, p. 18) especially the processes of encoding and decoding. The term 'competence' has been one of the most controversial terms in the fields of general and applied linguistics since then. The accepted notion of competence involved, generally, both innate and acquired knowledge.⁶

In contrast to the term 'Linguistic Competence' of Chomsky, Dell Hymes, an American anthropologist and linguist (1927-2009) proposes the term 'Communicative Competence' (CC, henceforth) in 1972 as a new notion of linguistic enquiry. The term CC refers to the ability of a speaker to use linguistic competence in a specific social context.⁷ With this, Hymes not only brings the sociolinguistic aspect to Chomsky's 'Linguistic Competence'⁸ but also reflects on the competences of actual speakers, not some idealized norm.⁹

⁴ Chomsky's 'Aspects of the Theory of Syntax' (1965, p. 6)

⁵ Chomsky's term 'Linguistic Competence' had challenged the behaviorist tradition started by B.F. Skinner that proposes that a child can only learn a language with the optimum amount of exposure and derives the grammar and lexicon in that language all by themselves without any special training.

⁶ (Renart, 2005, p. 1943)

⁷ Hymes's 'On Communicative Competence' (1972, p. 274)

⁸ Bargaric's 'Defining Communicative Competence' (2007, p. 95)

⁹ (Coupland, 1997, p. 5)

Hymes's discussion is launched by Chomsky's statement¹⁰ that,

“Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions... in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance...”

Hymes (1972, pp. 269-271) considers this statement as ‘a declaration of irrelevance’. He, first, directs our attention to the ‘homogeneous’ picture painted by Chomsky and mentions that in several speech acts, speaker and listener have differential linguistic abilities and hence not all speech communities are homogeneous in a strict sense. For the same reason, he regards Chomsky's theory as poignant since it does not cope with these individual communicative differences among the children.¹¹ Hence, it is stated that Hymes's concentration on shared knowledge and cognitive abilities of the language speaker goes beyond Chomsky's ‘narrowly defined notion of linguistic competence’, thus a strict separation between linguistic and extralinguistic phenomenon has become untenable (Gumperz, 1997, pp. 39-40).¹²

While commenting on ‘Linguistic Performance’, Hymes brings forth the salient connotation of the term ‘performance’ as an ‘imperfect manifestation of underlying system’ as in actual natural speech, we find the cases of ‘degenerate’ speech acts. Hence, Hymes's (1972, p. 272) statement that the avoidance of sociocultural features or sociocultural dimension in Chomsky's linguistic theory is not accidental starts making sense. By sociocultural features, Hymes (1972, p. 277) refers to socioeconomic differences, multilingual mastery, the relativity of competence in different languages, expressive values, socially determined perception, shared norms of evaluation of the variables, and contextual styles. Thus, the concepts such as speech act, acceptability of speech, speech community in Chomsky's linguistic theory are sociocultural variables and the term ‘competence’ of Chomsky is based on these social factors.

Extending the notion of ‘Linguistic Competence’, thus, Hymes opines that,

“A child who might produce any sentence whatever- such a child would be likely to be institutionalized: even more so if not only sentences, but also speech or silence was random, unpredictable.” (Hymes, 1972, p. 277)

Hymes (1972, pp. 277-278) holds that the children also have the tacit competence of speech act in terms of when, what, what not, where, with whom, in what manner to speak. In

¹⁰ (Chomsky, 1965, p. 3)

¹¹ As a graduate student in 1950-1954 at Indiana University, Dell Hymes, started his investigation into the relation between the language and culture, especially after the end of the Second World War, when the rise of several linguistic programmes carried out by American anthropologists mostly neglected American Indian studies (Hymes, 1992, p. 31). In his later article ‘Ways of Speaking’, Hymes describes (2009, p. 158) a speech community as an ‘organization of diversity’.

¹² Also see (Zhan, 2010, p. 50), and (Savignon, 2018, p. 2).

their sequential use of language, children display ‘sociolinguistic competence’ (Hymes, 1974, p. 75). This competence, according to him, is integral to their knowledge of the language and its features, and the speaker’s attitudes, values, and motivations concerning that language. Children acquire the set of rules or ways in which they can use their sentences. This ‘speaking appropriately’ in the speech community entails the existence of their tacit sociocultural knowledge or competence.

Children, in their learning to speak also learn appropriate ways to speak in a particular group as against another group of a speech community, which is known as ‘Language Socialization’. Hence, CC is the key component of social competence. The factors that are considered while speaking are as follows: Setting and Scene, Participants, Ends, Act sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms of interaction and interpretation, and Genre, acronym-ed as ‘SPEAKING’ (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015, pp. 231-234). Hymes (1992, p. 31) makes it explicit in his later writings that CC arises from two independent developments, *viz.*, transformational generative grammar and the ethnography of communication.

However, the term CC has changed its notion over time. Earlier in 1973, the term was used in the sense of ability to conduct spontaneous interaction in the second language.¹³ Hymes’s own emphasis on the term ‘competence’ in the sense of *abilities* and *skills* was missing. Among several later uses of the term CC, we find the meanings such as ‘communicative habits’, ‘a fluent speaker’s mastery’, and ‘command of a language’, and ‘the universal conditions of possible understandings’.¹⁴ Thus, the term CC subsumes the idea of fundamental cognitive or mentalistic ability in humans in using language to achieve desired outcomes by showing adaptability in different contexts (Duck, 1989, p. 92).

This paper refers to CC in the sense of an ability to communicate in a culturally appropriate manner to accomplish social tasks efficiently and fluently through extended interactions.¹⁵ Later scholars have combined these abilities of knowledge and implementation under the title ‘Communicative Language Ability’.¹⁶ Thus, the term comes to refer to the assimilation of knowledge, skills, and judgement in linguistic and other social, strategic domains of competence.¹⁷

3. Methodology

Observation, reporting and analysis have been the primary sources of information for the research. Participant’s observation is the primary method that the current research follows, in addition to an informal interview.¹⁸ The data is collected by observing in-person

¹³ (Hymes, 1992, p. 34), (Agar, 1997, p. 467)

¹⁴ See (Duck, 1989, p. 92), (Hymes, 1992, p. 34), and (Gumperz, 1997, p. 39).

¹⁵ (Tarvin, 2015, p. 2)

¹⁶ (Saleh, 2013, p. 103)

¹⁷ (Clarke, 2013, p. 3)

¹⁸ It is suggested that in the Participant-observation method, freeing oneself from the filter of one’s own cultural experience leads to a more successful understanding of the language use (Saville-Troike, 1997, p. 133).

communication and conversations on a phone call. The sentences uttered are noted down and handwritten notes are referred to during the documentation.¹⁹

Consent is sought from the near-family member of Arya and the person has been given full knowledge of the process of observation and was ensured about no physical or any other kind of harm in the process of observation, maintaining the confidentiality of the child, no misuse or fabrication of the data, and only academic use of the findings, etc. The child has been observed in normal settings in a natural environment without any specific requirements from her.

Arya has been observed for the following factors: the sequence of learning languages, the amount of using a particular language as against other, the degree of fluency in all languages, use of dialects and language varieties, sources of acquisition of new vocabulary and pattern of using it, use of borrowed words, the effect of her native language on her second language use, convergence behavior, language choice, language shift, code-switching, other conversational abilities such as style of starting a conversation, attention-grabbing techniques, turn-taking patterns, retaining attention and deliberate effort to make a conversation more interesting, inferencing, coherence, self-repair, etc. Although many of these factors overlap in the actual conversation, that is, in a single use of a sentence more than one factors can play its part, the current report tries to present each of them separately emphasizing one of them more than the other in a given setting.

4. Findings: A Case Study

It is not very uncommon for an Indian child staying in urban or suburban areas to be multilingual. In a general situation, every child may know at least two languages by the age of three years, one of them is her native language and the other is English as a medium of instruction in a preschool. When a child's native language is different from the regional language, as is the case in a cosmopolitan setting, a child acquires three languages simultaneously, although the degree of inter-language fluency might vary. Furthermore, in addition to three languages, in some cities with international schooling, a child learns a fourth and a foreign language at nursery school in a classroom environment.

Arya shows similar advanced capabilities in knowing five languages, being able to construct full-length sentences in at least four of them and readily transmitting the message she intends to just by the age of four years old. Her ability in using appropriate language in specific social settings is the main topic of the current research. Before exploring the communicative competence displayed by Arya in Section 0, a background is set of Arya's language abilities in Section 0 that would lay the foundation for the subsequent discussion.

5. Multilingualism

This section presents the *mise en scène* that forms the backdrop for the main argument of the report. It mentions the different scenarios *viz.* linguistic situations that have imparted

¹⁹ No audio message is being recorded, hence no use of transcripts is mentioned.

multilingualism in Arya. It gives the scrupulous details of how Arya has acquired the language and put it to use in her everyday life.

(a) Language Acquisition and Learning

The study refers to the following sources of acquisition of CC among children. They are: Mother's talk, nursery school, caretaker, and family structure and residential pattern.²⁰

Arya was brought up as a native speaker of Telugu²¹ in the initial ages i.e., till the age of two years. Living with an eight-member family that use Telugu for daily communication has given her a perfect linguistic situation in which she could acquire the language as her native tongue without any special instructions. Before the age of two years, when she was responding to the messages, she was exposed to Marathi,²² a regional language, by her mother and maternal relatives. This had led her to acquire both Telugu and Marathi at an early age, simultaneously.²³ The continuous exposure to both languages as a 'motherese'²⁴ from her mother and maternal relatives made her fluent in both languages by the age of three years.²⁵ She started using Marathi to converse with the female maids, artisans, and other workers at home apart from her parents. She converses in Telugu with other family members than her parents. This observation contrasts some of the beliefs that early bilingualism would impair a child's learning of both first and the second language, and that a child would not be as fluent as a monolingual of speakers of those languages.²⁶ The evidence suggests that children are flexible in learning more than one language and by the age of three-four years and can become fluent in both languages.

Arya was slowly exposed to Hindi²⁷ by observing her family members talking to the Nepali family that has migrated to India for livelihood almost six years ago before Arya's birth and has been staying with Arya's family working as household helpers. Furthermore, the cartoons, videos, and daily TV series have given her some exposure to both dialectic and standard varieties of Hindi. Soon after the age of three years, Arya started conversing in Hindi with the Nepali workers using words in Hindi and constructing small sentences.

²⁰ (Zhan, 2010, p. 50)

²¹ Telugu is one of the classical languages in India that belongs to the Dravidian language family and is spoken in the southern and east coastal parts of India. The eastern part of the city Solapur, Maharashtra state where Arya lives consists of a majority of Telugu speakers.

²² Marathi is one of the modern Indo-European languages, specifically of the Indo-Aryan sub-branch of the Indo-Iranian language family. It is spoken in the state of Maharashtra and some parts of the state of Karnataka.

²³ There are two language situations in which a second language is learned by a child. Firstly, when the second language is learned at school later in life after a child has acquired the first language (*sequentially*), and secondly, where a younger child is exposed to two different languages at the same time at home (*simultaneously*) (Steinberg & Sciarini, 2006, pp. 165-166).

²⁴ 'Motherese' is a short speech consisting of well-formed sentences spoken very slowly and clearly towards a child (Aitchison, 2008, p. 77). Sometimes, it has a comparatively higher pitch and exaggerated intonation contours (Aitchison, 2008, pp. 152-153). It is also known as 'parentese', 'caregiver speech', 'Adult-to-Child Language' (ACL), or as 'Child-Directed Speech' (CDS), etc. (Steinberg & Sciarini, 2006, p. 27) that can be received from many sources such as parents, siblings, relatives, friends, etc.

²⁵ Caregivers, such as parents play an important role in children's language learning process. A sensitive caregiver is supposed to enable the child learn the language faster (Aitchison, 2008, p. 74).

²⁶ (Steinberg & Sciarini, 2006, p. 161)

²⁷ Hindi is one of the official languages of India belonging to the Indo-Aryan language family. It is widely spoken in neighboring parts of northern India.

It was surprising as one of the family members noticed an almost three-and-half-year-old Arya talking in Nepali²⁸ with the children of this Nepali family while playing with them. The researcher has an insufficient amount of first-hand information about Arya's Nepali usage. It is not clear whether she can construct the full-length sentences in Nepali, owing to the limitation that the researcher herself is unaware of Nepali grammar. This observation confirms earlier linguistic studies, especially, the behaviorists that children are 'set' to extract the grammar for themselves if they have a sufficient amount of data at their disposal.²⁹ The linguistic situation in which the Nepali adults talking to their children in Nepali proved to be enough exposure for her to acquire a few words and phrases. Soon, Arya started using single-word phrases or 'holophrases'³⁰ in Nepali with the children in certain conditions.

Similarly, daily exposure to the English language as a medium of instruction in her pre-school and a sufficient amount of time when her family members read her stories in English has allowed Arya to learn some simple words and phrases in English that she uses occasionally in her speech. This is, nonetheless, a classroom-controlled setting as against the natural setting she had received to acquire other four languages. While the first four languages *viz.* Telugu, Marathi, Hindi, and Nepali are acquired by her without any instructions, the fifth language English was imparted in her with deliberate efforts. Furthermore, both the instructors at her pre-school and parents that read stories to her are second-language speakers of English.

(b) The Degree of Fluency in Each Language

Multilingualism has become a norm these days. However, it does not always have positive associations. In other words, no single person is equally fluent in all languages they know. Albeit, Arya was exposed to both Telugu and Marathi simultaneously, she shows variations in fluency in both languages. This phenomenon is what Hymes was suggesting by referring to Labov's study that linguistic competence can covary with the speaker.³¹

In the early days till the age of two years, Arya was more fluent in Telugu, while on the border of crossing the two years, she shifted to Marathi and started using Marathi more often than Telugu. The reason for choosing Marathi over Telugu can be numerous, however, the most probable reason behind switching to Marathi can be traced back to the 'Motherese' or 'Parentese' that she has got from her parents. Similarly, Arya manages to use holophrases in Hindi and Nepali. Nonetheless, she has less fluency in Hindi and Nepali as compared to either Telugu or Marathi. While, Arya can construct long, full-length sentences in Hindi, she is not very confident with her Nepali, which suggests the least fluency in Nepali as compared to other

²⁸ Nepali belongs to the Eastern Pahari sub-branch of the Indo-European language family and is mainly spoken in Nepal and Bhutan. Some states in India have given Nepali an official status as it has a significant number of speakers in many North-Eastern states.

²⁹ (Aitchison, 2008, p. 76)

³⁰ 'Holophrase' refers to one-word utterances by children that usually stand for a complete sentence. For example, the holophrase "Juice!" uttered by a younger child refers to the complete sentence "I want juice". Younger children express a variety of complex ideas and semantic functions by their one-word utterances (Steinberg & Sciarini, 2006, p. 7).

³¹ (Ohno, 2006, p. 26)

languages. Likewise, she is not able to construct novel sentences in English all on her own. Although, she repeats the words and phrases that she has heard from her teacher in an appropriate situation. In other words, Arya lacks the ‘creativity’ aspect of language that refers to the *continuity* or *productivity* or *openness* in constructing a novel, infinite grammatical sentences in English.³² The primary reason can be the source of language acquisition i.e., in naturalistic settings versus classroom settings.³³

While Arya obtained much exposure to Telugu and Marathi, she has obtained comparatively less exposure to the other three languages i.e., Hindi, Nepali, and English. Chomsky, referring to children’s innate language abilities, would argue, that children acquire a well-formed grammar of a language despite being exposed to inadequate data³⁴ as against the behaviorists. But if we adopt an empirical exploration, we *may* not confirm Arya’s acquisition of Hindi, Nepali, and English language at par with her acquisition of Telugu and Marathi.

The observations, however, emphasize the fact that the optimum amount of linguistic exposure imparts language abilities in children. Children are essentially participant-observers in their linguistic community, and they actively participate in using language by processes of observation and interpretation. Thus, a sufficient amount of linguistic input which works as a stimulus becomes unavoidable for them to derive rules of grammar. These environmental inputs trigger the language development in a child,³⁵ in which a child can construct a grammar and a lexicon of the given language. While Arya heard Telugu, Marathi, Hindi and Nepali, in descending order of amount of use, she became fluent in these languages acquiring the equivalent fluency in these languages. On the other hand, the lack of exposure to spoken English at home and nearby places inhibit her abilities in using English as a medium of conversation.

These observations accent the point that a child can be fluent in more than one language by the age of two years. Nonetheless, inter-language fluency covaries. They can even acquire the ability to use appropriate language in specific social situations, viz., the communicative competence on their own.

6. Communicative Competence as a Socialization Pattern

The research, now, sets forth focusing on the competence of Arya in acquiring the ability to use appropriate language in specific social situations, i.e., communicative competence. While exploring her ability of CC, the study takes her understanding of the socio-cultural organization, economic backgrounds, attitudes, intention, capacities and limitations, moods and emotions of the language speakers, along with other sociocultural variables such as space and time, genre, topic, message and purpose of the conversation,³⁶ etc. that are evident

³² (Aitchison, 2008, pp. 31-34)

³³ (Savignon, 2018, p. 1)

³⁴ (Steinberg & Sciarini, 2006, p. 209)

³⁵ (Fernández & Cairns, 2011, pp. 80-81)

³⁶ (Saville-Troike, 1997, pp. 142-143)

by her *performance* of refining, modifying, or changing the message, more specifically, language use. Since many of these variables co-happen in a speech act, that they co-occur concurrently, further documentation deals with them by the linguistic episode in which they occur, and not individually.

We refer to this faculty of modifying oneself as a ‘socialization pattern’. The attempt in ‘socializing’ by children include all their distinct linguistic behaviors such as their language choice, language shift, use of dialects, code-switching, etc. The effort to socialize or identify with the hearer can be assumed as the common underpinning of all their speech acts. This kind of *affiliation* or ‘like-mindedness’³⁷ especially in cross-cultural settings is one of the measures to evaluate a child’s ability in CC, although some studies have suggested that such socio-cultural differences can inhibit their communication.³⁸

In the quest for exploration of Arya’s language use patterns, we have derived some associations of linguistic situations and language choice. Figure 1 depicts the language choice made by Arya based on the type of the hearer or the interlocutor. She uses Marathi while conversing with people that she thinks are acquainted with it such as her mother, family members, her school friends, near residents that frequently visit, close guests that rarely visit, maternal relatives, neighbors, and local workers such as maids, cooks, and artisans working in the factory at their home. Except for the guests that rarely visit, every other type of person has a daily conversation with Arya in Marathi which has made her confident in using Marathi almost all the time.

She only switches to Telugu under specific circumstances when she finds that the hearer does not know any other language but Telugu, such as some of her near residents, neighbors, and some elderly adult female local artisans. Except for these cases, she downrightly uses Marathi if she has the knowledge that the hearer knows Marathi. Even though this speaker chooses to speak in Telugu with her, she answers the interlocutor in Marathi. For example, Arya’s nonagenarian great-grandfather who endorses the habit of speaking his native tongue at home constantly speaks with her in Telugu, but Arya conveniently moves to Marathi while replying to him. The investigator herself, while observing Arya’s fluency in the native tongue for the research, deliberately talks with her in Telugu but gets the reply in Marathi. The interim reasoning might be more confidence in using Marathi than Telugu or the fact that her mother using Marathi while talking to her led her to believe the superiority of Marathi over any other language.³⁹

³⁷ (Clarke, 2013, p. 10)

³⁸ (Zhan, 2010, p. 50)

³⁹ Mother’s talk is considered the most important source of early input (Zhan, 2010, p. 50).

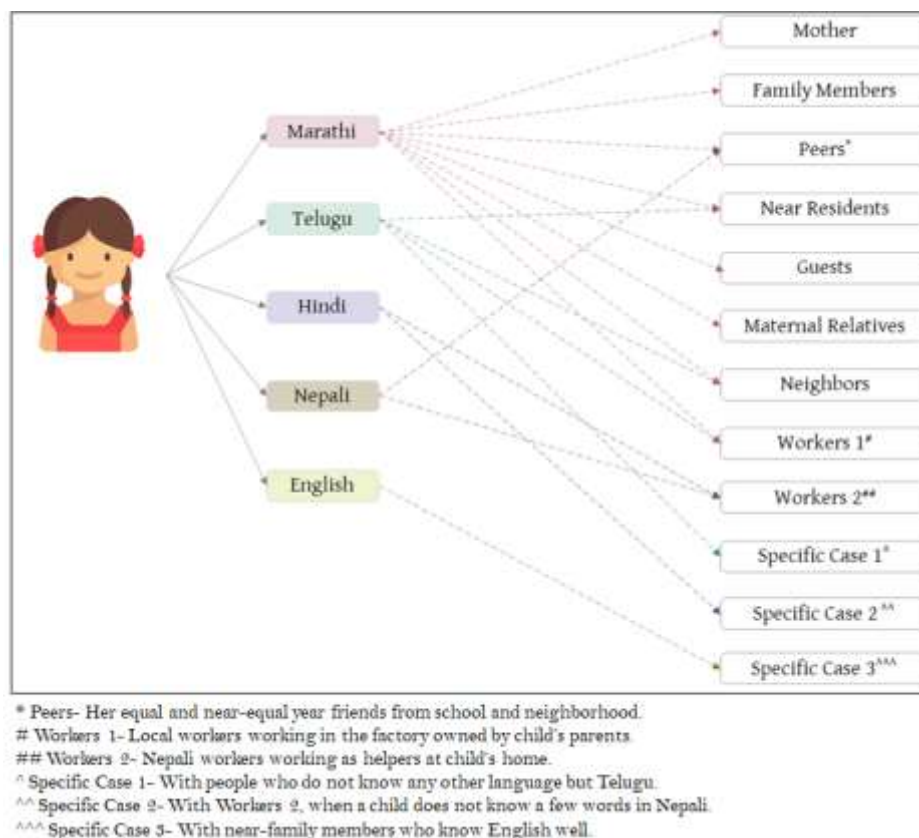


Figure 1: Arya's Multilingualism and Language Choice: Depiction of a Socialization Pattern

Arya chooses to speak Hindi, specifically some words and small phrases, with adult Nepali workers who do not know either Marathi or Telugu. Here Arya shows the tendency to connect with these workers to be more social. It accents the linguistic findings that children develop their language to cope with their everyday needs.⁴⁰ The children of these Nepali workers, a six-year-old girl and a three-year-old boy have acquired Nepali, Hindi and Telugu having obtained the most exposure to all three languages. Arya chooses to speak in Hindi with the female Nepali friend when Arya fails to have lexical access to some words in the Nepali language. In some interesting conditions, when Arya finds herself being not very fluent in Hindi as well, she smoothly shifts to Telugu for the successful transmission of the message, sometimes just replacing the Telugu word in a Hindi sentence. This shifting to another language is known as 'language alternation' or 'code switching' and is a common behavior among younger children (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015, pp. 212-213).

Intra-sentential code-switching has become a common occurrence in Arya's speech. Even though Arya is fluent in Marathi, she does not know a few equivalents for Telugu words, and she showcases the instances of intra-sentential code-switching where she retains the Marathi

⁴⁰ A child's effectiveness in her language use is one of the instruments assessing her interpersonal competence to achieve interpersonal objectives, as stated by Duck (1989, p. 93). Also, see (Aitchison, 2008, p. 125).

sentence and replaces only one word with a Telugu equivalent. For example, ‘*Bommārillu bhāṇḍī*’ instead of ‘*bhātukalī bhāṇḍī*’ (‘miniature utensils used for playing’), ‘*vankāya bhājī*’ instead of ‘*vāṅgyāchī bhājī*’ (‘brinjal sabzi’), ‘*chinnagā chinnagā tuḱaḱe kar*’ instead of ‘*choṭe choṭe tuḱaḱe kar*’ (‘cut this in small pieces’), ‘*soravā āṇ*’ instead of ‘*rassā āṇ*’ (‘bring [me] gravy’), etc. It seems that a child unconsciously resorts to the language they are more comfortable in, especially when the speech has some corresponding action afterwards, in which case a child focuses more on the semantics, thereby putting efforts in successful transmission of the message, rather than worrying and thinking about the language-appropriate word. Arya’s activity in transcending the grammatical rules and her concentration on the meaning or interpretation aspect of language is another measure to assess her CC.⁴¹

Her language choice in selecting Nepali, Hindi, Telugu depicts her confidence in using each language, in descending order, as per the demand of the situation as well as her interest in socializing with the interlocutor. The most interesting insight is that Arya never talks in Marathi with these people even though she is extremely fluent in it. This displays that children give the hearer and their abilities in conversation an important place in the speech act and modify themselves without any special instructions. Furthermore, they can identify the places in the conversations where they find themselves less fluent and *self-repair* their message so that the hearer can understand them fully. In addition to that, they can also recognize the difficulty in comprehension on the hearer’s part and locate the place of that difficulty and refine their speech accordingly by shifting to the mutual language to have *common ground* among themselves.

Considering Arya’s abilities in English, as explained earlier, she cannot construct novel sentences all by herself, but used holophrases in English such as “Go!”, “Stop!”, “Cut in half!”, etc. Most of these phrases are imperative sentences that she has heard in her pre-schools and mimics those sentences verbatim. She picks the complete sentences or whole phrases while talking and has not yet discovered for herself the syntax of English. Similarly, although she tends to use some negative constructions in English such as “Don’t do that!”, we are unsure if she has acquired the negation rules by herself, one of the earliest sentence structure rules acquired by children.⁴² In other words, she does not use English for daily communication but enjoys the sense of novelty when she uses these phrases while talking either in Telugu or Marathi.

It is observed that she uses English only when she knows that the hearers are acquainted with the language such as her uncles, some guests, and her grandfathers, and not with her parents and other family members that do not know English. The fact that Arya can use some context-appropriate English phrases correctly also accents the point that language comprehension precedes language production among children. Although, it does not mean that a child must understand all of the languages before being able to produce them. Her understanding of the interlocutor in terms of both their linguistic abilities and limitations helps

⁴¹ (Gumperz, 1997, p. 41)

⁴² (Steinberg & Sciarini, 2006, pp. 18-19)

her shift from English to other languages. This audience-oriented speech of a child is another variable by which we can study a child's ability in their CC.

7. Discussion and Future Scope

Based on the available data, it is argued that by the age of four years, children adopt convergence behavior in their language choice. Children try to be more social, become more like the other person, try to shift their behavior to accommodate the expectations that others have of them while they speak. This phenomenon is also known as 'speech accommodation theory' or 'communication accommodation theory'.⁴³ In some cases, Arya shows the deliberate efforts in shifting from Hindi to Nepali to Telugu to try to get connected with her younger Nepali friend, and in some other cases, she shows unconscious efforts in shifting to Marathi when her family members are talking with her in Telugu being almost unaware of doing so. Based on the type of audience or audience design, Arya orients her speech towards others. This is to gain social approval for oneself.

Her ability in identifying differences in terms of sociocultural variables in her environment and modifying her speech and behavior accordingly suggest her sophisticated understanding of interpersonal relationships and this 'competence' or 'competence performance'⁴⁴ as a social actor is demanding for any language user. With their language use, children created their social situation by taking part actively.⁴⁵

Thus, it is argued that, in cross-cultural settings, multilingual children display communicative competence in their language use without any special instructions, provided they are exposed to the optimum amount of linguistic exposure. This research argues that children use their communicative competence as a socialization pattern to identify themselves with kith and kin. This ability to use and implement their innate grammatical rules appropriately in specific sociocultural situations is acquired by children all by themselves, emphasizing the term 'competence' in the phrase 'Communicative Competence'.

However, there remain some unanswered questions. Such as, do a girl multilingual child shows different CC patterns or different dialects as a boy multilingual child, do children show varied competence in formal versus informal situations, etc. Some of the following questions will be important from a sociolinguistic aspect, such as, whether Arya chooses Marathi over Telugu because (1) she feels more confident in it, or (2) Telugu has comparatively low status than Marathi as perceived by her or has been indirectly imparted in her, or (3) learning of the second language has impaired her learning of the first language as some linguists had believed, and the more important question is whether Arya's first language would have a gradual death if she retains her speech only in the second language, etc. A few more psycholinguistic questions would help us understand children's language use patterns, such as

⁴³ (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015, pp. 99-100)

⁴⁴ (Duck, 1989, p. 91)

⁴⁵ (Danby, 2002)

whether lack of exposure to spoken English at home will put Arya at disadvantage when she attends her school since English is the medium of instruction in schooling, and whether she tries to change her cultural pattern after learning English, will it have profound social or psychological consequences on her, whether Arya finds increased linguistic insecurity when she will find a ‘better’ variety of Marathi than the vernacular Marathi that she speaks will it have a positive or negative consequence on her existing language variety and will that lead her to struggle with identity issues, etc.

Do multilingual children in sub-urban areas such as Solapur may show different cognitive capacities than children that have been brought up in multilingual cosmopolitan cities such as Pune and Mumbai, especially when children learn a foreign language in their schools since the age of six years, what are other factors that influence children’s language choice such as gender, age, economic status of their parents, place of residence, source of income, social status of their parents, how proficient children are in using gender-based distinctions in languages like Hindi versus Telugu,⁴⁶ etc., does multilingualism affect children’s long term academic achievements as compared to monolingual or even bilingual kids, the question of whether speaking in the first language and retaining it throughout the childhood betide more advantages than shifting to the second language in later life, whether Arya has acquired the word-order rules and other syntactic rules of Nepali, whether Arya retains her tone and pitch in Marathi while speaking in Nepali, whether she can form relative clauses and passive sentences in all languages she knows, in interethnic situations, how does a child understand economic factors, differences in goals and aspirations, other historical and cultural factors at their tender age are some more questions that need to be answered.

Some of these questions can be answered by a longitudinal study of both monolingual and multilingual children to understand different types of general, cognitive, and psychological abilities. Some recent Indian scholars have studied the simultaneous acquisition of languages in children and harnessed some insights in developing therapy-based models.⁴⁷ In her subsequent research, the author of this research work plans to seek answers to some of these questions especially focusing on Arya’s conversational abilities from age 4 to 6 years. It will be carried out both by observation and experimentation, in both formal and informal situations.

While writing this paper, the child has turned six years and chooses to speak both Telugu and Marathi. Some discrepancies in the data can be seen as a child is growing. Nonetheless, this research will be useful in understanding an average child’s capacity to grasp the inputs and knowledge from the surrounding and put it to use whenever they find it useful and necessary.

8. Conclusion

⁴⁶ This insight is motivated by the reviewer’s comments on the manuscript. I am grateful!

⁴⁷ Ibid.

A child's linguistic abilities cannot be underestimated. By the age of four years, children acquire native-like fluency in more than one language. Even though children's native language affects the syntax of their second language in the initial stages, they can learn the second language with an equal amount of fluency if taught before the age of two years, provided a proper amount of exposure is available. Children also display a great deal of communicative competence in all languages they speak, without any special instruction. They use their skills of communicative competence as kind of a socialization pattern by adopting the convergence behaviour to be identified as more like their audience. Their communicative competence can be measured by their choice in language shift, and code-switching. The understanding of sociocultural settings on their part and their choice of language use as per the audience design are some of the variables that suggest their innate competence in using proper utterances in proper environmental settings.

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