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Language Acquisition Patterns: A Case Study of a Child Acquiring Sinhalese as the First Language

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Child language acquisition is an innate strategy which reveals the psychological base of human language. Innate hypothesis is the pre-knowledge of the language. Human beings are born with this ability of internalising the first language with the help of language Acquisition Device (LAD). Children acquire structural regularities of their mother language (L1) from their environment. This happens in the critical period of the language development which is identified as the period from first six months to three years. This research is a case study focusing on the nature and the patterns of acquiring the Sinhalese language as L1. The child was in its critical period of language acquisition and data was collected using electronic and manual transcription. Structural linguistic analysis and theoretical concepts of Transformational Grammar on language acquisition such as competence and performance, generalisation, simplification, deep structure and surface structure are employed as the methodology. Accordingly, the gradual development of L1 acquisition from 6 months to 24 months are discussed. Babbling, sound acquisition and patterns of one word utterances, two word and three word utterances are among the findings. A comparison with the previous studies reveal that the patterns of above utterances, generalisation and simplification are commonly visible in the acquisition period. Also, the child often proves that competence is greater than performance. The results of the study further highlighted some semantic, syntactic and morphological overgeneralisations. Thus, this study and its findings are of significant importance to psycholinguists, language therapists and to researchers interested in studying child language acquisition process.

Key words: child language acquisition, first language, overgeneralisation, patterns, simplification