Trends of Code-Mixing in a Bilingual Nigerian Child: An Investigation of a Three-Year-Old Child

Authors : Salamatu Sani

Abstract : This study is an investigation of how code-mixing manifests in the language development of a Nigerian child, especially in the Hausa speaking environment. It is hinged on the fact that the environment influences the first language acquired by a child regardless of the cultural and/or linguistic background of the parents. The child under investigation has been subjected to close monitoring on her speech hitherto. It is a longitudinal study covering a period of twelve months (January 2018 to December 2018); that was when the subject was between twenty-four and thirty months of age. The speeches have been recorded by means of a tape recorder, video, and a diary. The study employs as a theoretical framework, emergentism, which is an eclectic of the behaviourist and the mentalist theories to the study of language development, for analysis. This is in agreement with the positions of Skinner and Watson. Sequel to this investigation, it was discovered the environment is a major factor that influences the exposure of a child to a language more than the other factors and that, if a child is exposed to more than one language, there is a great tendency for such a child to code-mix and code-switch in her speech production. The child under investigation, in spite of the linguistic background of her parents, speaks the Hausa Language much better than the other languages around her though with remarkable code-mixing with other languages around her such as English and Ebira languages. The study concludes that although a child is born with the innate ability to acquire a particular language, the environment plays a key role to trigger the innate ability and consequently, the child is exposed to the acquisition of the dominant language around her at a particular given time.
Keywords : bilingual, code-mixing, emergentism, environment, Hausa
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