LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT AND LITERACY

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One of the principal questions related to language impairment, focuses on the essence of the impairment. Is it merely a chronological delay and the child having a language impairment is moving slower but keeps a proper pattern of language development, or is there a qualitative and irregular deviation from a normal language development.

H. Potter and A. Rom [24] have reviewed the two approaches that deal with this issue. **The first approach claims that there is a qualitative difference between language of a child with language impairment and that of a normal child:**

L.B. Leonard [6] supports this approach and states that in comparing models of languages of children with language impairment and normal children, one can see that those with language impairment use more defective grammatical structures and fewer transformations than their normal peers. The grammatical structures produced by the population with language impairment are dissimilar to those produced by younger normal children. Meaning, the delay is not just chronological.

H. Potter and A. Rom [24], who have examined Hebrew speakers having language impairment have reached a similar conclusion, and claimed that language difficulties accompany the children also in school age.

L.B. Leonard et al. [5] have stressed that although it appears that the language of children with language impairment is similar to that of young children with normal development, they present an entirely different profile in the field of morphology and grammar.

The second approach states that the delay in language development is merely chronological and in a normal development model:

Supporters of this approach claim that children with language impairment begin acquiring language later or slower but they follow the normal development phases. Comparisons of language models of normal children and those suffering from language impairment, by Johnston and Scherry and Morehead and Ingram, in the seventies, have shown that children with language impairment acquire grammatical morpheme in an identical order as the normal children but at a later development phase [24].

In a research conducted by H. Potter and A. Rom in 1983 [24], language samples of Hebrew speaking children with language impairment ages 4.6 - 5.6 and normal children ages 2.9 - 3.9, matched in their language age, were compared. The samples were analyzed from a

morphologic-lexical aspect. The results revealed that there is no significant difference in the frequency of usage of nouns and verbs but there is a significant difference of the frequency of usage of prepositions. The regular children have been using significantly more prepositions as compared to the group with language impairment. Thus, from the outcome of that research, researches claim that it is difficult to unequivocally characterize the essence of language impairment. There is a tendency to view language impairment as a hindrance or a qualitative developmental delay with qualitative abnormality in the creative usage of different connections (prepositions). It is hard to determine whether the difficulty of children with language impairment is in categories acquisitions or in the understanding how to use them creatively.

The character of language impairment and impaired language skills: Many a researcher has tried to characterize the impaired language skills and understand the source of difficulties of SLI children.

L. Swisher and D. Snow [14] claimed that in a pre-school age children with language impairment are already demonstrating a significantly lower level of words acquisition than that of their peers, due to the difficulty in learning and in inclusion of language information. It seems that the children are slow in language processing and in usage of sentence and conversation structure to recognize unfamiliar words, and that there is a difficulty in language reproduction [13]. The poor grammatical comprehension ability has been attributed to inadequate and inefficient knowledge of language structures and difficulty in access to syntactic information [12]. P.J. Connel and C. Stone [2], considered the source of the impairment being inefficient study of new symbolic relationships, and in the deprivation of ability to store and extract language material. According to them, there is a need to reinforce the relation between phonological representation and the meaning, stored in the memory. Researchers L. Swisher et al. [13] have reviewed the findings of researches related to language difficulties amongst the population with language impairment: In the research of Montgomery et al, in the nineties, it was found that children with language impairment are slower in language information processing and have difficulties in usage of sentence structure for the recognition of an unknown word in it. Their reaction time is longer in language reproduction tasks. The slow language processing process brings about an inferior position due to the need of simultaneous processing of information over and over again. J.A. Kierman in 1993, has examined the ability to extract the essence out of language information and found out that children with language impairment have a difficult time extracting the meaning out of a conversation or a sentence, which naturally makes it difficult to understand and codify consecutive sentences. Many a researcher has considered the meta-linguistic awareness skill in general and morphology in particular, as the

primary language difficulty: H. Rubin et al. [12] has claimed that those having language impairment have difficulty in analyzing form/contents implicit and explicit knowledge. The difficulty in putting these skills to action is manifested mainly in the school years – when one needs to deal with assignments of written language. Writing, just like verbal expression, requires implicit knowledge of language rules, grammatical attentiveness and a meta-linguistic ability for the location of mistakes and corrections thereof. The difficulty in those skills grows in writing when other problematic skills for the children, are involved.

L.C. Moats and C. Smith [7] have also dealt in the deprivation of alertness and morphological analysis abilities – in regards to language impairment. According to their opinion these deprivations disturb the ability of children in school age who have language impairment to acquire new words and knowledge on their language. They exhibit an incurring deprivation in vocabulary and also an inferior ability of organizing the accessibility to words through etymology [8]. These children have a tendency to remember words as separate units and not as part of words families. This is manifested in the spoken and written language.

R.P. Cutts in L.C. Moats and C. Smith [7] has examined the development of phonological awareness and showed that this alertness begins to develop in normal children at the ages of 3-4, when the difficulty for children having language impairment already in place. As a result there is a difficulty in syntax and morphology alertness. The deprivation of morphological and phonological knowledge is not reduced with the exposure to the written system and those children need a direct instruction in order to acquire these skills. The meta-linguistic deprivations of children with language impairment are realized in phonological awareness, awareness of words, syntax awareness and pragmatic awareness [18]. According to the researchers' opinion, these findings point out the limitations in acquisition of knowledge about part of language and not the difficulty in access to language knowledge.

H. Rubin [11] has considered that children with language impairment acquire their intuitive knowledge of language but they come across a difficulty in acquiring meta-linguistic awareness. This awareness is important in establishing language representations and their retrieval, and thus the meta-linguistic deprivation causes an interruption in language development.

Stein in H. Potter and A. Rom [24] who has examined Hebrew speaking children of young age with language impairment, and then reexamined them in school age, had shown that children who had been defined as "latent speakers" at a young age do not close the gap and encounter lips functioning difficulties also in school age (age 6 - 7), especially in understanding prepositions, passive and active and vocabulary.

What is Literacy? Literacy a system of social and cultural behaviors related to language with its many facets and characteristics, while stressing the written language and the different contexts it uses. Literacy is not synonym to the skills of reading and writing but in also includes them as part of the general system of knowledge of attitudes and beliefs regarding the written language and its usages Holdway, 1975 in Z. Walden [27].

From this definition it is evident that literacy evolves over time through social-cultural processes and that it is not a technical skill one can learn in a short period of time. Thus it is also obvious why we should speak about its nurturing rather than about the teaching of it, why its development has to be described by a sequence and not by two ends of a scale and why it arouses an ideological discussion and not just a practical one [26].

Literacy is the familiarity with written language – why are we writing, when, etc.

The literacy approach causes an arising of the need to use a written word in a child – an interaction between the speaker (writer) and the addressee (reader).

"Ability to read" is the entrance pass of the child into society thus the question of dealing with written language arises as early as in kindergarten, so that he can enter the society and communicate with it [28]. The moment an infant is exposed to written language, the literacy growth process begins, and its inception is in the creation of awareness to the written language and its continuance is in the acquisition of reading and writing.

Literacy includes the ability of the child to comprehend a text in the suitable level and transfer thoughts and ideas to writing. The culminating research in the last few years deals extensively with the fist revelations of literacy which develops in a person – emergent literacy. From the research of Golman et al. in 1984, it turns out that when children are intelligently exposed to the written language in the same level that they are exposed to the spoken language, many of them acquire the skill of writing and reading and also the complete socialization of the language, meaning the ability to better integrate in a literate society. In these cases literacy develops naturally and with joy, first in the kindergarten and at home and afterwards in school, and much pain and sorrow are spared from the children, the parents and the system [27].

Literacy evolves during the professional and spiritual life of a person, the development of the ability to read, comprehend, criticize and evaluate written messages [19].

The term literacy has been in use as early as the 70's. The term in Hebrew was "Oryanut" (as it is today) but also "Neorut". In the Even-Shushan dictionary "Oryan" is the Hebrew term for "Oraita" which means the Tora (Bible). Some use it as alternative term for "education" or "knowledgeable". And some use it for the affection, willingness and desire to study.

According to G. Lewin [23], literacy is an approach which puts the nurturing of cognitive development at any age and particularly in pre-school age forward as the primary educational mission.

In recent years an education approach has developed stating that instead of teaching the child to read and write as a skill, an understanding of a language in the broad sense needs to be nurtured.

The child's family and the kindergarten has an important role in cultivation of emergent literacy of children. There is no recommendation of teaching of reading at the age of kindergarten, but the children should be exposed to diverse written materials (notes, signs, recipes), to the rules of writing, as well as to games that enrich the lingual awareness and the phonological awareness of children.

Fundamental premises to the literacy approach:

1. Linguistic literacy development is a natural ongoing process at home, in the kindergarten and school.
2. In a literate society written language acquisition begins already in infancy.
3. Children arrive at the kindergarten in different levels of realization of the literacy potential inherent in each one of them.
4. Literacy develops in circumstances in which reading and writing is being used for real everyday life needs.
5. The linguistic knowledge, the awareness of forms and sounds existing in a language and the knowledge of the world of children constitute the base for the acquisition of written language.
6. The creation of environment of literacy in the educational establishment will allow for the natural linguistic development of children, the realization of their inherent ability and would prepare them for the success in many learning assignments later on.
7. Pleasant experiences, self-confidence and believing in the child's ability are a necessary condition to the occurrence of learning.
8. Transferring the weight of study from the kindergarten teacher over to the child, the child becomes more responsible to educational, learning activity that occurs in the kindergarten [20].
9. The pupil will not be a walking reserve of knowledge, but the educational system will bring about a condition in which he is able to reach an independent thinking in social contexts [21].

10. Allowing for freedom for the child, the pupil will execute educational activities that would enhance him with the help of the teacher. The emphasis in the child orientation is that the very nature of the child wishes to explore and learn.

It is not the intention of the literacy approach to teach kindergarten children to decode words and texts or to write texts in a proper spelling, as the kindergarten is not the place where children are supposed to formally learn to read and write. Children in a kindergarten are supposed to develop early literacy which mainly includes alphabetical skills and the beginning of reading and writing skills, and also a variety of linguistic skills and book orientation [25].

Philosophical educational aspects in the literacy approach emphasize the providing of opportunities. Literacy development is possible in a stimulating environment which encourages for opportunities to practice it [4].

The talents of each pupil must be allowed to be expressed and parallel to this everyone must be let to progress in his own pace without being forced into a framework fixed for all. The literacy approach puts the child in the focus and the traditional approach puts the contents in focus.

In the literacy approach, social interaction is also a foundation for the learning process, thus studying while having a discussion amongst pupils lessens the tension and competition between individuals.

According to the literacy approach, the intention is not to provide the child with reading and writing skills in the narrow and formal sense, but to nurture the understanding of a written language in the broad sense. The developmental viewpoint stresses the need to consider the comprehension and perception of the child for the learning process. J. Piaget [9], [10], who introduced the importance of the cognitive-developmental background and its implications on the educational work, stresses the development of written language from the children's viewpoint prior to the formal and systematic intervention. Parallel to that, the program will stress the social interactions and the activities of adult with a child and child with child on the subject of written language. The Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky [15], [17], has significantly raised the meaning of the cultural-social aspect in the process of learning development. He had described these two processes as related to one another, and unlike Piaget, he saw in the educational environment as a leader of the development, according to him what a child could do with the help of an adult he would be able to manage without assistance in the next level.

Principles of literacy development:

Children experience in written language in the process of their growing up.For some children, this experience starts in as early as the age of 6 months, when fathers and mothers read

stories to them, and thus enclose the child and the book with a literacy event that brings about an emotional satisfaction. Other children create a written language in the process of other literacy event types. In their participation in literacy events and through active reading and writing, children develop three main principles regarding written language:

1. Principles of relation or semiotics – that comprise the realizations the children are having regarding methods of the expression of meaning in a written language, methods of expression of oral language for the expression of meaning.

2. Functional principles – that comprise the realizations children are having regarding the significances of written language and its purposes.

3. Linguistic principles – that comprise the realizations the children are having regarding the way a written language is organized and its presentation for the purpose of communication.

In their first developmental stages, children may build up assumptions that later on will be rejected by them. In fact, it is possible that some of these principles will hinder the development of other principles for a period of time.

The different principles are parallel and there is an interaction between them up until the child sorts and differentiates the vital ones for a production of meaning from those not useful for this cause, identifies their different modus operandi with the limitations each one has and finally locates all the principles that are important to understanding other symbols systems which he develops. These principles cannot be taught in the customary programs for teaching how to read. They develop in all the children but due to the unique character of the use of written language by each child, there is a difference in their growth time and ways they develop [3].

L.S. Vygotzky in E. Korat and M. Snapir [21], has dealt specifically with the development of writing in young children. He has examined the relations of development of different representational systems: the spoken language, the iconic language (painting) and the written language. The relation of writing to the spoken language seems unimportant and unessential, as he has considered writing as a graphic representation of speech. L.S. Vygotzky [16] has described speech and drawing as first echelon representatives that represent referents, meanings and scenarios. Whereas writing is a secondary representative system as it represents sounds that in turn represent referents, meanings and scenarios. L.S. Vygotzky described the difficulty of transition to a secondary echelon of representation. From the educational ramifications of this approach he has considered the development of relationship between the language and thinking of higher importance than the development of some perceptional skills. According to him the process of teaching to write needs to be based on the child needs as they naturally evolve through his activities and not as an artificial training

L.S. Vygotsky much stressed the existent social occurrence between an adult (parent, educator) and the child, and between children and themselves, what is customary to term "colleagues teaching". But his short life had left the question of "how" regarding educational activity open for his successors.

G. Lewin [22] stresses two things of importance, which are:

1. Literacy relates not only to or mainly to the technique of reading and writing. Its meaning is much wider and it relates to learning in general, to the acquisition of many different skills and to the love for learning. All this will be in jeopardized by a too early formal learning.

2. A literate person has opposite characteristics that the illiterate, even if he is smart illiterate. This means that a literate person loves knowledge and would want to acquire it in all fields of life. If the educator will position herself as an identification character of "a knowing person" and not an identification character of "a teaching person", she would promote the literacy of her pupils. G. Bruner, the American psychologist had pointed out this difference, and said: to know, one needs to be literate; to learn, a formal knowledge is enough. This difference is essential and significant.

One of the questions that arise in the educational system is when and how reading should be taught to the regular children's population and to children population with language impairment. Presently, the knowledge at our disposal regarding developmental processes that entail transforming of a child into a literate reader or a member in a literate society, teaches us that reading and writing are two skills, but the combined ability to comprehend, read, respond, write – is an ability that we are interested that our children would acquire. That is why we must deal in literacy development and not just in acquisition of reading and writing skills. Cultivation and enrichment of literacy, is not a technical skill. We must cultivate and develop the natural appetite of children, of those with language impairment as well, to find out, to read and understand. And we must not be swept away into a ravenousness of gluttony of unique work pages for various skills [29]. Literacy does not usually relate to reading and writing techniques and literacy relates to learning in general, to the love of learning. A too early formal learning endangers the love of natural learning. A literate person – loves knowledge and information in all areas of life. He is the opposite from an ignoramus even if he is a "smart-ignoramus". The class teacher must create for herself an image to identify with as a "knowing person" rather than a "teaching person" – this way she would promote literacy in her pupils. "to know one must be literate. To learn, formal knowledge is enough. This is the entire difference and it is essential and significant" – J.S. Bruner [1].

Key word: language impairment, literacy, children with language impairment, morphology grammar, language skills, SLI, latent speakers, prepositions, vocabulary.

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