

LEXICAL ACQUISITION IN GARO CHILDREN AGED 1-6 YEARS

Juliana Ch. Sangma, Research Scholar, Dept. of Linguistics, Annamalai University, Annamalainagar, (Tamil Nadu)

Dr. R. Lalitha Raja, Asst. Prof., Dept. of Linguistics, Annamalai University, Annamalainagar, (Tamil Nadu)

ABSTRACT :

The study examines how Garo children, aged 1-6 years acquire vocabulary. It focuses on vocabulary development phases, cognitive processes, and the influence of environmental and cultural variables. This study included testing methodologies, interviews, and observation as its approaches. The children's lexical ability was assessed by the researcher using a picture dictionary as a test object. The test results are saved in videos and audio recordings. The results of this test showed that the children had developed distinct lexical tabulations based on word categories, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, question words, prepositions, conjunctions, exclamatory, and social expressions, depending on their age. Beginning with early vocalizations and progressing to basic word creation and increasingly intricate syntactic structures, the study delineates significant developmental milestones.

Key-words: Lexical acquisition; Garo children; Garo language; Vocabulary development.

INTRODUCTION:

One of the most important aspects of language development is lexical acquisition, or the process of learning words and their meanings. It happens when someone learns a language different than their mother tongue. A lexicon is a collection of lexemes, which are a language's smallest words or basic word units that are typically put as entries. The acquisition of lexicons is one of the major forms of language acquisition. With lexicon acquisition, a child's lexicon growth can be observed in his or her capacity to generate and connect words is indicative of the growth of their lexicon when it comes to lexicon acquisition. Learning the meaning of words entails more than just being able to recognize and pronounce them; it also entails comprehending their syntactic, phonological, and semantic characteristics. This is known as lexicon study. Infants start learning words at birth, and from about the age of 18 months on, there is a noticeable increase in vocabulary that is known as the "vocabulary spurt." A combination of social interactions, contextual information, and natural cognitive talents are the mechanisms underlying lexical acquisition. Understanding how learners assimilate vocabulary is largely dependent on theories like statistical learning. In the context of Garo children, who belong to the Garo tribe of Meghalaya, India, lexical acquisition occurs within a distinct sociocultural and linguistic environment. The Garo language, an integral part of the Tibeto-Burman language family, has its own set of phonological, morphological, and syntactic rules that influence the way children learn words.

The process of comprehending human language involves multiple stages, known as lexical acquisition. The first lexicon acquisition process is what happens to children when they acquire their mother tongue.¹ At one year old, a child was uttering his or her first word in their native tongue. The child has acquired roughly fifty words by the time they are 18–20 months old, and by the time they are 2 years old, they typically know 200–300 words (Barrett, 1995).² Youngsters pick up words quickly; in the most well-researched instance, a toddler learned 45 words in just one week (Dromi, 1987, p. 15).³

Children are extremely diligent in gathering information about their surroundings even before they can speak. Children develop simple semantic features for words they are familiar with. The kids comprehend the words, gather information about them, and use it to further their understanding of the world. Words that are familiar with the home environment, like family members, close relatives, pets, fruits, and so on,

are among the first types of controlled children when it comes to lexicon acquisition. Thus, several factors contribute to the underlying hypothesis of meaning or semantic features, including (1) the meaning features that children use are regarded as being on par with meaning features worn by adults; (2) children's knowledge and experience of the world are limited, so at first, they will only use two or three features of significance for a word as lexicon input, and (3) the feature selection process is based on the child's experience and is therefore based on perceptual information with all of its limitations.⁴

STAGES OF LEXICAL ACQUISITION :

As they develop from infancy to early childhood, Garo children go through numerous crucial phases of lexical acquisition, much like children learning any other language. Although these phases are essentially universal, the child's linguistic environment also influences them.

1. Pre-linguistic Stage (6-12 months):

Infants do not make words during the first year of life, but they are very sensitive to the phonetic patterns of the language that is spoken around them. Infants of the Garo language start to identify common speech patterns and sounds, such as the consonant-vowel-consonant syllable structures that are typical of the language. Early babble may imitate the rhythmic and tonal characteristics of the Garo language, establishing the groundwork for subsequent word formation.

2. Holophrastic Stage (12-18 months):

Garo children usually begin uttering words by the time they are 12 months old, and they frequently use single words, or holophrases, to convey whole ideas or sentences. Even before babies develop identifiable words, they usually copy the rhythms and intonations using noises during this era. A child might say "mamam" (food) to express their hunger, for instance. This phase, when nouns predominate early lexicons, especially those pertaining to immediate things and people, signifies the start of productive vocabulary learning. Cultural relevance is also important; Garo children typically learn phrases about food, the outdoors, and family members early in life. Children can practice producing words and explore with the sound of their language with the aid of these vocalizations.

3. Two-word Stage (18–24 months):

Children go through a "vocabulary burst" between the ages of 18 and 24 months during which they pick up new words quickly. At this stage the child starts to string words together to form simple phrases. "chiringna," for instance, signifies "the child wants to drink water." These combinations, which show the child's developing comprehension of the connections between things and actions, frequently adhere to fundamental semantic principles, such as noun-verb or adjective-noun pairs.

4. Telegraphic Speech (24–36 months):

Around the age of 2 or 3, children begin to construct more complex sentences, but they are still telegraphic in nature—that is, they omit words that are not required, including conjunctions and articles. Garo children begin employing verbs, adjectives, and possessive pronouns more frequently. When a child says "angnigari" (my car), they may be using a possessive construction. Here, the evolution of syntactic structure reflects the development of cognitive capacities that allow for more sophisticated communication.

5. Complex Sentences (3–6 years):

Children begin to construct more complicated sentences by the age of 3, demonstrating a better comprehension of grammatical elements including question construction, negation, and verb tenses. When children get closer to the age of six, their vocabulary grows considerably, enabling them to communicate more complex and abstract thoughts. At this age, children's vocabulary grows quickly, frequently due to the social and educational experiences they have, such as play and storytelling.⁵

OBJECTIVES:

- i. To explore the vocabulary acquisition process in Garo children.
- ii. To observe the growth of children's lexical skills.

RESEARCH METHODS:

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were obtained from children aged 1-6 years. Primary and secondary data are the two categories of source data. Primary data were gathered verbally through reading, audio-lingual, and audiovisual assessments on the research topic. Secondary data were acquired by means of supplementary materials, including written narratives and images. Information obtained using the following methods: (1) verbal test; (2) interview; (3) document analysis; and (4) observation. Data sources were gathered from children and parents. Guidelines for observations, interviews, and document analysis serve as instruments for gathering data. The research process begins with the process of determining the research instrument, i.e., picture dictionaries, photos and written stories.

The children were asked to identify what each picture in the picture dictionary depicted after they were shown by the researcher. The children listened to the researcher's stories and imitated them by pointing and glancing at the written versions. Direct observations were obtained during the process of learning. To see every child's behavior and reaction as they were learning was the goal of direct observation. Using audiovisual methods consisting of sheets of observations to be examined, researcher recorded all conditions related to the learning process.

RESULTS:

Researchers use observation to directly study behavioral components of language in order to establish a link between stimulus and response. It is thought that children who exhibit effective language behavior respond appropriately to stimuli. If this response is warranted in order to help kids acquire their native tongue, then it will become ingrained in their behavior. Based on observations, it appears that youngsters responded fairly well to the stimulus that was given to them. Children's comprehension of the instructions for the tasks given to them indicates that, as study subjects, they possess a level of cognitive knowledge commensurate with their age. Table 1 shows Noun Acquisition of children aged 1-6 years and in Table 2 Lexical Development of children have been listed.

Table 1. Noun Acquisition of Garo children

Noun Acquisition	Stage – I (1-2 Years)	Stage – II (2-3 Years)	Stage – III (3-4 Years)	Stage – IV (4-5 Years)	Stage – V (5-6 Years)
1. Household Things	4	12	15	16	17
2. Kinship Terms	8	8	10	12	14
3. Animals	11	13	16	18	20
4. Birds	3	3	4	6	9
5. Insects	2	4	5	6	7
6. Dress Materials	5	5	6	10	11
7. Fruits	3	6	7	9	15
8. Vegetables	5	7	11	13	16
9. Public	NA	1	4	6	7

Places					
10. Days and Months	NA	NA	2	3	6
11. Vehicles	7	8	9	9	9
12. Food and Drinks	7	11	11	13	15
13. Body Parts	4	5	9	11	13
14. Shapes	NA	NA	2	3	4
15. Color	1	3	4	6	7
16. Crops	NA	2	3	3	4
17. Flowers	1	1	2	3	5
18. Leaders	NA	NA	NA	2	4
19. Weather	2	2	2	2	3
20. Sports	NA	NA	2	2	3
21. Occupation	NA	NA	3	4	5
22. Worship Places	1	1	1	1	1
23. Festivals	1	1	1	3	5
24. Numerals	3	3	5	6	10

Table 1 illustrates that children at the age of 1-2 years acquire nouns related to objects and people that are immediately relevant to their daily lives. At this stage, their vocabulary is driven by interaction with parents, caregivers, sensory experiences, and their physical environment. The nouns they acquire are concrete and easily observable. The primary domains where children show lexical acquisition are: household things (e.g., kap for “cup”, tibi for “TV”), kinship terms (e.g., abi “sister”, dada “brother”), animals (e.g., moo for “cow”, wak “pig”), birds (e.g., do-do for “bird”), body parts (e.g., dak for “hand”, da-a for “leg”). However, children at this stage were unable to acquire or articulate nouns in more abstract and complex domains like public places, days and months, shapes, crops, leaders and occupations. These terms refers to ideas and experiences that are beyond the scope of immediate and familiar environment, and children are not yet exposed to or cognitively ready to understand, and thus, are typically acquired in later stages of development.

Between the age of 2-3 years, children begin to explore their environment more actively and interact with a wider range of objects and experiences, both at home and outside. Their lexical acquisition includes more diverse categories. This reflects a natural cognitive and linguistic development as children grow in their ability to recognize, remember, and use new nouns, especially in relation to the concrete objects in their environment. At this stage, children are able to name items from domains such as: animals (e.g., matju for “cow”, achak “dog”), birds (e.g., dak-dak for “duck”, ka-ka for “crow”), fruits (tirik for “banana”, aranos for “pineapple”), vegetables (alu “potato”, kobi “cabbage”), kinship terms (e.g., a-ai “mother”, baba “father”), body parts (e.g., mikgon for “eye”, ja-a “leg”), food and drinks (e.g., dut “milk”, chi “water”), vehicles (e.g., wakgari for “JCB”, otto “auto”). However, they still struggle with more abstract or socially complex terms like days and months, shapes, leaders, sports, and occupations. These concepts require a more advanced understanding of time, space, and society, which typically develops in later stages.

By the age of 3-4 years, children exhibit a significant increase in their ability to acquire and use nouns. By this stage, they are able to name objects and concepts from almost all the domains included in the

study, indicating substantial lexical development. Specially, children in this stage can name: public places (e.g., skul “school”, market), days and months (e.g., Sunday, January), shapes (e.g., boroma “round”, pelgapa “flat”), body parts (e.g., ok “stomach”, ja-a “leg”), colours (e.g., gipok “white”, gisim “black”). However, children still struggle to acquire and correctly name nouns related to “leaders” (such as “nokma” for village leader or other similar social roles). While they have made significant progress in learning a broad range of concrete and abstract nouns, the concept of leadership remains challenging.

By the time children reach the age of 4-5 years, their cognitive, linguistic, and social development has reached a stage where they can name objects, people, places, and concepts that span a broad range of categories. Their acquisition of nouns from nearly every domain signals their readiness for more formal education and a greater understanding of the world around them. By this stage, children can effectively use nouns across categories, such as: household things (e.g., chammus “spoon”, palang “bed”, balis “pillow”), kinship terms (e.g., ambi “grandma”, atchu “grandpa”, mama “uncle”), animals (e.g., matchu “cow”, achak “dog”, wak “pig”), public places (e.g., skul “school”, opis “office”), days and months (e.g., sonibar “Saturday”, December), shapes (e.g., boroma “round”, peldenga “flat”), crops (e.g., mi “paddy”, misi “millet”), vehicles (e.g., baik “bike”, trak “truck”), body parts (e.g., sre “tongue”, nachil “ear”), occupation (e.g., dokdor for “doctor”, pulis for “police”). By this age, children have nearly complete lexical acquisition across all major domains, showing a well-rounded vocabulary that includes concrete nouns (like animals, body parts, household things) as well as abstract concepts (like days, months and occupations). The progress is marked by a robust understanding of both familiar and less tangible concepts.

By the time children reach the age of 5-6, they are at a developmental stage where their language acquisition is almost complete in terms of noun usage. Their fluency across all domains indicates that they have developed a comprehensive vocabulary that includes both concrete and abstract concepts. This stage represents the culmination of their lexical acquisition, preparing them for formal education and more complex language use. At this stage, they are able to name objects, people, places, abstract concepts, and social roles with ease and confidence. At this final stage of lexical acquisition, children can confidently name nouns across all domains, such as: household things (e.g., baltin “bucket”, soria “tub”), food and drinks (e.g., ruti “bread”, dut “milk”), kinship terms (e.g., a-ai “mummy”, baba “papa”, mama “uncle”), animals, birds, insects (e.g., matcha “tiger”, do-reng “kite”, chibrim “ant”), public places (e.g., park, restaurant), days and months (e.g., somber “Monday”, January), shapes and colours (e.g., ro-a “long”, gitchak “red”), crops (e.g., me-rakku “maize”, misi “millet”), vehicles (e.g., trak “truck”, bus), body parts (e.g., ku-sik “mouth”, ginting “nose”), occupations (e.g., teacher, nurse), leaders (e.g., prime minister, chief minister, nokma “village leader”), sports (e.g., football, cricket, basketball), weather (e.g., sin-kari “winter”, ding-kari “summer”, wachikari “rainy”). Their ability to name these nouns reflects both their cognitive development and the rich language input they receive from their environment. By the age of 5-6, children can use these nouns fluently in everyday conversation, reflecting an advanced level of linguistic competence and social understanding.

Table 2. Lexical Development of Garo children

Lexical Acquisitions	Stage – I (1-2 Years)	Stage – II (2-3 Years)	Stage –III (3-4 Years)	Stage – IV (4-5 Years)	Stage – V (5-6 Years)
Nouns	71	96	134	166	208
Verbs	6	8	9	12	16
Adjectives	2	2	3	3	3
Adverbs	NA	2	3	3	3
Pronouns	1	3	3	5	5
Question	NA	2	2	3	5

Words					
Prepositions	NA	1	1	1	1
Conjunctions	NA	1	1	1	1
Exclamatory	1	2	2	2	3
Social Expressions	2	3	4	5	5

In Table 2 on lexical development of Garo children, the researcher examined various stages of lexical acquisitions. The study focused on the acquisitions of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, question words, prepositions, conjunction, exclamatory and social expressions. In stage 1 of lexical acquisitions (1-2 years), children are just beginning to explore and understand language. Their vocabulary is limited to basic, concrete words and simple phrases, primarily focused on nouns and verbs that relate to their immediate environment. Children at this stage can identify and use nouns (e.g., a·ai “mother”, baba “father”), verbs (e.g., cha·a “eat”, ringa “drink”), adjectives (e., namja “bad”), pronouns (anga “I”), exclamations (like “wow”), and they start to mimic expressions like greeting (e.g., “hi”, “bye”). Prepositions, conjunction and adverbs are not yet part of their vocabulary.

CONCLUSION:

Within this linguistic and cultural environment, the study of lexical acquisition in Garo children aged 1-6 years sheds light on the formative phases of language development. The results show that a variety of factors, such as exposure to the native language, social interactions, and the home environment, have an impact on the vocabulary acquisition process. When it comes to their lexical development, children in this group often follow a set pattern, beginning with simple nouns and working their way up to verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and more intricate sentence structures. Early exposure to both spoken and written forms of the Garo language is critical, as is the role that caretakers and family members play in supporting language development.

This research underscores the need for continued support of the Garo language in early childhood education, as it plays a fundamental role in shaping children’s cognitive and communicative abilities. By understanding how Garo children acquire language, educators and parents can better support their linguistic development, ensuring that they grow into confident and effective communicators in both their native language and any additional languages they may learn.

REFERENCES:

1. Marak, Caroline R. (2018). Studies on Garo and its Cognate Languages. Anundoram Borooah Institute of Language, Art & Culture, Assam.
2. Barret, M. (1995). Early lexical development. In P. Fletcher and B. MacWhinney (Eds). Handbook of Child Language (pp.362-329). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
3. Dromi, E. (1987). Early Lexical Development. Cambridge University Press.
4. O’Grady, William (2005). How Children Learn Language. University of Hawaii. Cambridge University Press.
5. Phillips, E. G. (1904). Outline Grammar of the Garo Language. The University of Michigan. E. Hill, Press Superintendent, Assam.