


Chapter 5

Sibling Relationship and Communication Disorders

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ABSTRACT

Sibling relationships are one of the most influential relationships, and they last for a lifetime. The dynamics of the relationship would evolve with respect to time. In the initial years of years of life, the relationship is filled with jealousy, competition, and rivalry; however, this relationship would turn more cordial. The dynamics of relationships are quite different if one of the children (siblings) has a communication disorder. The attention of the parents would be channelized on the target child with communication disorder, this would elicit negative feelings in the less attended sibling. In addition to this, the sibling can face humiliation, shame, and embarrassment caused due to their sibling, this can strain the relationship further. The current book chapter discusses the evolvement of sibling relationships with time, potential variables influencing sibling dynamics, and sibling relationships in communication disorders. It also discusses the sibling relationship involving some specific disorders like autism, intellectual disability, and stuttering.

BACKGROUND

Learning to talk is considered a pivotal milestone; in fact, it is considered an achievement as far as early childhood is considered. Children learn speech and language automatically without the need for explicit or formal teaching. Language development, if developed properly, allows a child to develop receptive and expressive communication skills through an arbitrary system of signs or symbols. Speech development, if developed properly, allows an individual to communicate their needs, thoughts, and feelings through sounds. Despite the fact that speech and language development serve two different functions, they are

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interconnected and need to work together for a child to be able to talk in a grammatically correct way. Speech and language development takes place in real-time and in a matter of months, toddlers are expected to transit from meaningless/hesitant single words to continuous and effortless sentences. During this time, the child's vocabulary is said to expand steadily and proportionately, known as vocabulary growth. Therefore, children would show lexical diversity within a short period amusing the parents. Language development on a larger per se is viewed as a means of developing social communication skills. This social communication skill is considered an important interface in exploring novel opportunities for social understanding and unveiling new facts and fantasies concerning the real world.

The role of nature and nurture is a debatable factor as far as language development is concerned. Factors related to nature would include genetic factors (McLeod, 2023) which directly influence language development. These genetic elements would have an effect on a wide range of characteristics, from physical appearance to behavioral characteristics (Hayiou-Thomas, 2008). These genetic elements are essential for language development and would facilitate the normal brain development including the growth of the sensory and motor systems. Nurture on the other hand would refer to external or environmental or ecological variables which can influence the development. Factors like early childhood experiences, social relationships, and stimulation would play a direct role in shaping development (Bronfenbrenner, Morris, Damon, & Lerner, 1998; Irwin, Siddiqi, & Hertzman, 2007; Kendra, 2020; UNICEF, 2021). Although most scholars in the field of language development acknowledge that both nature and nurture play a significant role in language acquisition, there is greater inclination towards the external factors in deciding language acquisition (Fitria, 2020).

There are two common assumptions pertaining to language acquisition. The primary fundamental presumption is that learning a language is a product of mental processes that take input from the environment and shape it to create the intended output (Chomsky, 1965; Crain & Lillo-Martin, 1999; Hoff, 2003; Hoff, 2005). The second presumption, which is based on the bio-ecological model of development, is more widely accepted and popular as far as language acquisition is considered. The bio-ecological development model emphasises the role of social stimulation in language development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1988; Tudge, Gray, & Hogan, 1997; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). This model of language development contends that parents play a key influence in language acquisition and undermines the importance of the internal system.

The role of parents in language development: Language development is considered a complex process as it would depend on various factors related to the child as well as the environment. Language development is viewed as a foundation skill or a precursor for the development of communication skills, literacy development, and school readiness. Parents would play a key role in this because they are the primary source of interaction and frequently serve as the child's first teachers. Positive parent-child interactions are discovered to be crucial in influencing a child's reading environment and language development, and the stimulation is considered to be more effective in the early years of the child's life.

Research in this direction roots back to the seminal work of Snow (1977). This study indicated that the stimulation provided by the parents is pivotal in language development. This earlier stimulation is known by the term 'mother ease' or 'child-directed speech'. Since then, an abundance of studies has been done on how child-directed speech affects language development, particularly in toddlers who are typically younger than three years old (Hoff, 2003; Rowe, 2012). This raises the question of whether the quantity and quality of stimulation, both of which are thought to be crucial for language development, can predict the rate of language acquisition.

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