

## Evidence of The Language Acquisition Device (Lad) in the Holy Qur'an

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### خلاصة

هذا البحث يسلط الضوء على بعض الأدلة القرآنية التي تؤمن بوجود وسيلة لاكتساب اللغة (LAD) في عملية اكتساب لغة الام. ان هذه الدراسة مستوحاة من منظور علم اللغة النفسي في حين ان تصميم البحث هو بحث نوعي. وتم تحليل البيانات التي تم جمعها من خلال قراءة القرآن الكريم و تحليل آياته. وقد تم تحليل النصوص القرآنية بالاعتماد على آراء العديد من علماء الإسلام. وقد وجدت الدراسة الآيات التالية التي تؤكد وجود وسيلة تستخدم LAD في اكتساب لغة الام: س31:2، س55:1-4، س78:23، س2:76، س17:36، س16:78، س9:32، س23:67 أظهرت هذه الآيات أن الله سبحانه و تعالى هو الذي يزود الأطفال بقدرة فطرية وبيولوجية تستخدم كوسيلة في تعلم اللغة، وبالتالي يقودهم إلى اكتساب لغتهم الأم في غضون سنوات قليلة. كما أنها تسلط الضوء على دور البيانات اللغوية (البيئة) التي يفهمها الطفل خلال مراحل تطور اللغة

### Abstract

This paper highlights some Quranic evidence that supports the availability of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) in the first language acquisition process. The study was inspired by the psycholinguistics perspective and a qualitative research design was adopted. The data which were collected through reading the Qur'an were analyzed through content analysis techniques. The content of the data was analyzed through the views of many Islamic scholars. The study found the following verses to support the availability of LAD in the first language acquisition: Q2:31, Q55:1-4, Q23:78, Q76:2, Q17:36, Q16:78, Q32:9, Q67:23: These verses showed that it is God Almighty that provides children with an inbuilt and biological language learning ability, thus, he lead them to acquire their mother tongue in a matter of a few years. They also highlight the role of linguistic data (environment) that a child comprehends throughout the stages of language development.

## 1.1 Introduction

This paper highlights the evidence(s) of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) from the Holy Qur'an. The notion of language acquisition device begins with the American linguist Noam Chomsky who argued that the first language acquisition process cannot succeed without the presence of a specific linguistic system of principles and parameters that every healthy newborn baby is genetically given (Akmajian et al, 2010; Hauser et al, 2002). It is a mental device whose main function is the comprehension and production of human language. Chomsky's argument is based on the fact that despite the non-finite character and complexity of human language, young children, without the need for any formal instruction, manage to acquire the system in a matter of few years (Akmajian, 2010, Fromkin et al, 2011). He maintained that two criteria are responsible for this non-finite character and complexity of the languages, namely, creativity and recursion (Akmajian, 2010). On the one hand, creativity means that speakers of any language are capable of creating and producing new words and sentences that they never heard before. Without this characteristic, the new technological gadgets, diseases, and objects might not have names, and, thus, we can not talk or make sense of them. On the other hand, recursion refers to how an infinite number of expressions can be generated from a finite one (Akmajian et al, 2010; Crystal, 2010). Consider the following example:

- (1) The student...
- (2) The student who is writing a letter...
- (3) The student who is writing a letter to his parents...
- (4) The student who is writing a letter to his parents from Iraq...

From the above, it can be seen that the phrase "*the student*" can be iterated indefinitely; the number of expressions that can be derived from it may go on forever. However, Chomsky argued that despite the creativity and recursive nature of human language, children are capable to acquire it within a short period due to the availability of the LAD. In addition to that, Chomsky maintained that the available

language data in the children's environment is insufficient and inadequate to arrive at grammar capable of producing a non-finite set of utterances throughout their life. The acquisition is, therefore, guided by an innate capability. This innate capacity is known as the innateness theory of language acquisition.

One thing to note at this point is that, by the LAD, Chomsky does not mean that experience, instruction, or any other linguistic input is not needed in the acquisition process, rather, this inbuilt ability (LAD) like many other biological abilities requires environmental data to set-off the developmental stages (Fernandez & Cairns, 2011). Despite the LAD being one of the properties of the newborn brain, an adult-like competence and performance do not develop at once, rather, the LAD “generates a series of increasingly more adult-like child grammars and lexicons, each of which conforms to the general pattern of human language” (Fernandez & Cairns, 2011:99). This brought the discussion of the stages of language acquisition. The question of whether all children follow similar stages during the acquisition process has not been answered with convincing empirical evidence. Various scholars provide various interrelated stages of language acquisition. However, Fernandez & Cairns (2011) believed that “all children progress through similar milestones on a similar schedule” (Fernandez & Cairns, 2011:98).

According to them, children begin to respond to auditory stimuli around week 18 of gestation. This helps them to access certain patterns on their phones. In the first six months, the infant's vocals lead to sounds such as cooing, gurgling, crying, and other none linguistic sounds. From 6 to 12 months, the child begins to babble which is mostly of similar syllables such as baba, dada, and gaga. From 12 to 18 months, the child may utter a complete word with its meanings. However, sometimes, he may underextend or overextend the meaning. As days wear on, the child acquires a large number of his native vocabulary until he achieves an adult-like competence and performance. These stages and processes that the children go through, Chomsky believe that they are unconsciously attained through

the help of the language acquisition device. This study wants to highlight the evidence of the language acquisition device (LAD) from the Holy Qur'an and the prophetic traditions.

## 2.1 Methodology

The study was inspired by the psycholinguistics perspectives. A qualitative research design was adopted. Psycholinguistics which is a branch of linguistics that seeks to explain the psychological and neuro-biological. Simultaneously, these two factors are responsible for speech production and comprehension provide various theories and assumptions as to how infant and adult speakers master a language. The notion of LAD is one of the most discussed topics since the Chomski'an revolution. The data of this study were collected purposely by reading the Qur'an and pinpointing the verses that highlight the evidence of the LAD. The content of the verses was examined through various Qur'anic tafaseer which contains the opinions of the verses by various scholars from the companion and the subsequent religious teachers.

## 3.1 Analysis and discussions

The Qur'an is a Divine Book that contains the words of God Almighty sent to the final messenger Muhammad (S. A.W) through angel Jibril over a period of 23 years. God Himself said that we have not left anything in the Qur'an, - it contains everything that man needs to know from religious, social, and scientific phenomena. It discusses the origin, diversity, and the process of language acquisition (Shariq, 2020). About the origin of language, God Almighty is the one that initially taught the first human being the names of everything in the following verse:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

( وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ )

*“And He taught Adam all the names (of everything), then He showed them to the angels and said, “Tell me the names of these if you are truthful.” [Qur’an - 2:31]*

Before the creation of the first human being, God Almighty present His decision to the angels of creating another creation, the angels communicated their doubts and said to God Almighty that these creations may disobey You and violate Your principles. Above that, you will not even create anything that is more knowledgeable than us. In order to prove them wrong, God Almighty created Adam and imparted to him the names of things and their knowledge. God then brought those things to the angels and asked them to name them. They respond that the creations know nothing other than what you taught them. Then God Almighty asked Adam to name them, and he does. According to Ibn Kathir, this shows the superiority of Adam over the angels and then ordered them to greet him. This event marks the beginning of the origin of human language. Imam Qurdubi the author Tafsir Aljai’il Ahkam interprets the word Al-Asmaa (names) to include language. He further stated that Ibn Khuwaz claims that the verse means that God Almighty taught Adam “languages in full and in detail” (Cahyana & Muhajir, 2021:8). By this, we can say that, God Almighty imparted to Adam the names of everything in order to make language a human-specific tool for communication. We can imagine the world without language or the ability to talk, we can imagine what human beings would be without language or the ability to communicate. Our life may be irrelevant and complex without language. There is nothing we do without language. We do business with language, we tie marriage not with language, we divorce with language, we express our feelings with language, we declare our faith with language, and we worship the God Almighty with language. God Almighty knows that Adam contains an inbuilt language acquisition device before imparting in him the names of everything. By this, we can say that the LAD was there with the first human being created by God Almighty. In fact, the superiority of the first human being over the angels was confirmed due to the availability of his language-learning ability.

Also, God Almighty shows clearly in the following verses that children managed to acquire their mother tongue without much formal instruction as they are genetically endowed with a language learning ability:

*The most compassionate (Q:55:1)* —————> ( الرَّحْمَنُ )

*Taught the Qur'an (Q55:2)* —————> ( عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ )

*Created man (Q55:3)* —————> ( خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ )

*And taught him eloquence (Q:55:4)* —> ( عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ )

From verses 3 and 4 above, it can be seen that God Almighty stated that it He who created the man and taught him eloquence. Verse 4 was translated by many scholars and the majority of them mentioned that it does not mean eloquence alone, rather, it means that is God Almighty that teach man how to speak. To begin, Mufti Taqi Usmani translated it as it is God that teach man how to express himself (how to speak), Mustafa Khattab also translated it as taught them (human beings) the speech. The khattab translation goes back to the first event that took place between God Almighty and the angels. In Tafsir Aljalalyn, the verse was also translated as it is God Almighty that taught man speech and utterance. Many Islamic scholars such as Wahiduddin, Qaribullah and Darwish, Sarwar, Marmaduke, Shakir, Hilali and Khan, Maturrahman, Unal, Maududi, Abdul-Haleem and many more are of the opinion that the verse simply means that it is God Almighty that taught man how to speak (Qur'ano.com, 2023). Also, Albagwi argued that Adam spoke 700,000 languages because to him the word Al-bayan ( البيان ) means the whole language (Cahyana & Muhajir, 2021).

By this, the verse does not mean that God Almighty uses a formal method of teaching, rather, by sitting with him and telling him that this is A and this is B and so on, rather, it means that God Almighty has provided for a man the ability to unconsciously acquire a language. By unconscious, it means that human biology was endowed with language learning ability that does not need any rigorous formal process. This endowed process is a property of every healthy baby's brain. It is part of a new born makeup. This inbuilt language learning ability provides the child with Universal

Grammar (UG) and Acquisition Strategies. Universal grammar provides the mechanisms that are part of the grammar of all human languages, thus, any child can acquire any language as long as he is in contact with its inputs. The UG then:

*“guides language development in three ways. First, the child will develop a grammar consisting of phonological, morphological, and syntactic components. Second, those components will include the principles basic to all languages. Third, the parameters specified in UG will guide the child’s discovery of the particular characteristics of the target language”* (Fernandez & Cairns, 2011:100).

Without such Divine intervention, it will be difficult for children to master the grammar of their language without taking a long time. Verse 4 (*And taught him eloquence*) (Q:55:4) (عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ) is an indication that it is God Almighty that ease the process and biologically endowed the children with that learning ability. This is how the LAD is dealing with language acquisition. The process is an inbuilt process that God Almighty unconsciously guides a child to attain an adult-like grammar. Many verses in the Qur’an support the innateness of the language acquisition process, below are some of them:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(قُلْ هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْشَأَكُمْ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ)

*"It is He Who has created for you (the sense of) hearing (ears), eyes (sight), feeling and (hearts) understanding; little thanks you give" (Q23:78)*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا

"Verily, We have created man from a drop of thickened fluid (semen) to test him; so We made him hearing, knowing." (Q76:2)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ مَسْئُولًا

"You shall not accept any information, unless you verify it for yourself. I have given you the hearing, the eyesight, and the brain, and you are responsible for using them (Q17:36)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَاللَّهُ أَخْرَجَكُمْ مِنْ بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

"It is He Who brought you forth from the wombs of your mothers when you knew nothing, and He gave you hearing and sight and intelligence and affections; that you may give thanks to Allah." (Q16:78)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوْحِهِ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ

"But He fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him the soul; And He gave you (the faculties of) hearing (ears), sight (eyes) and heart (feeling and understanding); little is the thanks you give!" (Q32:9)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قُلْ هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْشَأَكُمْ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ

"Say It is He Who has created you (and made you grow), and made for you the faculties of hearing (ears), seeing (eyes), feeling and understanding (heart): little thanks you give." (67:23)

Central to the above verses is that God Almighty mentions and emphasizes that it is He that provides us the *hearing ability*. Hearing ability is nothing but an aspect of language comprehension. The linguistic data that is available in any language can be acquired by a child as long as he is able to listen as the adult speakers articulate it. Children are capable of mastering all the phonological, morphological, and syntactic aspects of their native language through listening. No one can prevent them. These verses are supporting Chomsky's argument that "we are designed to walk. That we are taught to walk is impossible. And pretty much the same is true of language. Nobody is taught language. In fact, you cannot prevent a child from learning it (Chomsky 1994:1). Moreover, since language acquisition is counted as an unconscious learning process, Imam Al-Attas argued that knowledge can be obtained through the *sound senses* and the *sound reason*. The former includes perception and sensory observation, while the latter contains the sense of intellect and intuition (Cahyana & Muhajir, 2021). He viewed language acquisition as a process obtained through sound sense and sound reason. That is, it is an intuition-based ability guided by the Divine inspiration after getting contact or getting the desired input.

## Conclusion

This paper provides some Quranic evidence that supports the role of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) in the first language acquisition process. It discusses the origin and purpose of language and then strongly shows that the language acquisition process cannot hold without the availability of an inbuilt linguistics device as part of the human makeup. An inbuilt, unconscious, innate, or anything that can be considered metaphysical is seen by the Muslim as a God-made ability. However, God Almighty does not impart language/knowledge as in the formal school system, rather, He did it through inspiration. In fact, God Almighty as it is discussed above in Qur'an 55:4 claimed to be one

that taught/imparted the language in the human mind. That is why no one knows when he or she masters the grammar of his native language. Moreover, God Almighty claimed to have provided man with the auditory system; a system that guides his comprehension process.

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