Open Access
AL-MANAR: Jurnal Komunikasi dan Pendidikan Islam
Vol. 15, No. 1, June 2026
https://journal.staimsyk.ac.id/index.php/almanar/index

The Mechanism of First Language Acquisition in Children from the Perspective of Modern Arabic Linguistics: Analysis of Innatism and Interactionism Theories

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ARTICLE INFO
Article history:
Received
March 28, 2026
Revised
May 29, 2026
Accepted
June 30, 2026

Abstract

First language acquisition in children is a multidimensional phenomenon that continues to be debated in linguistics, psycholinguistics, and modern Arabic linguistics. This article aims to critically examine the mechanisms of first language acquisition through a comparative analysis of innate and interactionist theories from a modern Arabic linguistic perspective. Innate theory places biological capacity as the primary foundation of language acquisition, assuming that children are born with an innate linguistic apparatus that enables natural mastery of the language system. In contrast, interactionist theory asserts that language ability develops through a dynamic interaction process between the child's cognitive potential and the socio-cultural environment that provides linguistic input. Using library research methods and a descriptive-critical analysis approach, this article examines various contemporary Arabic linguistic thoughts and theories of language acquisition developed within the modern linguistic tradition. The results of the study indicate that innate explanations, although successful in revealing the universal and creative aspects of children's language, tend to pay less attention to the diversity of social contexts and variations in language input. On the other hand, interactionism provides a more comprehensive explanation of the role of the environment, but often fails to adequately explain the origins of children's universal linguistic capacities. Modern Arabic linguistics tends toward a synthetic approach that views first language acquisition as the result of a complex interaction between biological predisposition, cognitive development, and socio-linguistic experiences. This integrative approach provides a more adequate theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of first language acquisition in children and its relevance to the development of contemporary Arabic linguistic studies.

Keywords: first language acquisition, modern Arabic linguistics, innatism theory, interactionism theory, psycholinguistics, child language development, contemporary linguistics.

Published by STAI Masjid Syuhada Yogyakarta
Website https://journal.staimsyk.ac.id/index.php/almanar/index
ISSN 2615-8879
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INTRODUCTION

Language is a fundamental instrument in human cognitive, social, and cultural development. During childhood, language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a means of constructing knowledge, identity, and social interaction. Therefore, first

language acquisition has become a central issue in modern linguistics, psycholinguistics, and neurolinguistics (Rowland, 2022; Hoff, 2023).

First language acquisition refers to the natural process by which children acquire the language used in their environment without formal instruction. Interestingly, most children are able to master complex language systems in a relatively short time, despite never receiving explicit explanations of the rules of phonology, morphology, syntax, or pragmatics (Rowland, 2022; Ambridge et al., 2023). This phenomenon demonstrates that language acquisition is not simply a process of imitation, but involves interacting biological, cognitive, and social mechanisms (Hoff, 2023; Torkildsen et al., 2023).

Neurolinguistic development further reinforces this complexity. Neuroimaging research shows that the language networks in Broca's and Wernicke's areas begin to develop from an early age and mature through the interaction of genetic factors and a child's linguistic experiences (Evanson et al., 2025; Husein et al., 2025). These findings indicate that language cannot be explained solely through innate or environmental factors, but rather through a dynamic relationship between the two (Evanson et al., 2025; Ambridge et al., 2023).

In the study of language acquisition, the main debate still centers on the theories of innateism and interactionism. Innatism, pioneered by Chomsky, argues that humans possess innate linguistic capacities in the form of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) and Universal Grammar (UG), which enable children to acquire language naturally (Ambridge et al., 2023; Massofia et al., 2024). This approach can explain children's linguistic creativity in producing language structures they have never heard before. However, this theory is often criticized for not paying enough attention to variations in the linguistic environment, which have been shown to influence children's language development (Hoff, 2023; Verhagen & Leseman, 2022).

In contrast, interactionist theory places social interaction as the primary factor in language acquisition. Language development is viewed as the result of a reciprocal relationship between a child's cognitive capacity and the quality of their linguistic environment. Various studies have shown that child-directed speech, the intensity of family communication, and social experiences significantly influence the development of children's language abilities (Khattab & Keren-Portnoy, 2025; Hoff, 2023; Verhagen & Leseman, 2022). However, interactionism also faces criticism for not fully explaining children's ability to make linguistic generalizations beyond the language data they receive (Ambridge et al., 2023; Torkildsen et al., 2023).

This debate becomes even more compelling in the context of Arabic. As a Semitic language, Arabic has a root-pattern morphology system that demands a high level of linguistic abstraction. Furthermore, the phenomenon of diglossia the simultaneous use of standard Arabic (al-fuṣḥā) and dialects (al-ʻāmmiyyah) makes the Arabic language acquisition environment more complex than that of many other languages (Al-Qasemi & Dromi, 2024; Rakhlin et al., 2025; Shahbari-Kassem et al., 2024).

Recent research indicates that Arab children are able to recognize complex morphological patterns from an early age, supporting the assumption of innate cognitive readiness (Al-Qasemi & Dromi, 2024; Massofia et al., 2024). However, the same research also confirms that the quality of linguistic input and family interactions have a significant influence on the development of these abilities (Khattab & Keren-Portnoy, 2025; Rakhlin et al., 2025). These findings suggest that both innateness and interactionism make important contributions, but are inadequate when used in isolation.

Although research on Arabic language acquisition has grown rapidly in recent years, most studies still focus on either biological or social aspects. Research on Arabic morphology tends to emphasize cognitive and neurological factors (Al-Qasemi & Dromi, 2024), while other studies focus more on environmental influences, family communication, and diglossia

(Rakhlin et al., 2025; Shahbari-Kassem et al., 2024). Consequently, the relationship between biological predisposition and social experiences in Arabic language acquisition has not been comprehensively elucidated.

Based on these conditions, there is a research gap in the lack of studies that specifically integrate innate and interactionist theories within a modern Arabic linguistic perspective. In fact, the development of contemporary language acquisition theories actually shows a tendency towards an integrative approach that combines biological, neurological, cognitive, and social factors within a single analytical framework (Ambridge et al., 2023; Evanson et al., 2025). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the mechanisms of first language acquisition in children from a modern Arabic linguistic perspective through a critical examination of innate and interactionist theories. This study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between innate linguistic capacity, Arabic language structure, and social experience in children's language development.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a library research method. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study aims to understand, interpret, and synthesize scholarly concepts and empirical findings related to first language acquisition, the nativist theory, the interactionist theory, and their relevance to Arabic language learning. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore phenomena in depth through the interpretation of textual data and the contexts in which they are situated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than merely collecting and summarizing literature, library research involves systematically identifying, evaluating, comparing, and synthesizing knowledge generated by previous studies. This process allows researchers to identify theoretical developments, conceptual relationships, differences in findings, and existing research gaps that require further investigation (Snyder, 2019). In this study, the library research method was employed to develop a comprehensive synthesis of the nativist and interactionist perspectives in explaining the mechanisms of first language acquisition, particularly within the context of modern Arabic linguistics.

The data sources consisted of both primary and secondary materials. Primary sources included the seminal works of Noam Chomsky on the theory of nativism and Universal Grammar, Lev S. Vygotsky on cognitive development through social interaction, and Jerome Bruner on the Language Acquisition Support System (LASS). These works were selected because they constitute the foundational theories of language acquisition (Bruner, 1983; Chomsky, 1965; Vygotsky, 1978). Secondary sources comprised scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and previous research discussing children's language development, the acquisition of phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics, as well as studies on Arabic language acquisition. Additional literature addressing Arabic root-and-pattern morphology, the acquisition of distinctive Arabic phonemes, Arabic diglossia, first-language interference, and their implications for Arabic language instruction was also included.

Data were collected using the documentation technique. This method involved systematically identifying, reviewing, and recording relevant information from books, scientific articles, and previous research. Document analysis enabled the researcher to obtain relevant data through careful reading, selection, coding, and interpretation of written documents (Bowen, 2009). The data collection process consisted of several stages. First, keywords such as *first language acquisition*, *nativist theory*, *interactionist theory*, *child language development*, *Arabic language acquisition*, *Arabic morphology*, *Arabic diglossia*, and *Arabic language learning* were determined. These keywords were searched in English, Arabic, and Indonesian to obtain comprehensive and diverse sources. Second, the identified literature was screened based on titles, abstracts, keywords, publication year, and relevance to the research objectives. Third, the selected publications were examined thoroughly to identify key concepts, theoretical arguments, empirical findings, and educational implications. Finally, the extracted information was organized and classified according to the major themes of the study.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This analytical approach facilitates the systematic interpretation of textual data through coding and thematic categorization, enabling researchers to identify recurring themes, conceptual patterns, differences in perspectives, and broader research trends across the selected literature (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis was conducted in four stages. The first stage involved data reduction by selecting only information directly relevant to the research focus while excluding unrelated materials. Following Miles et al. (2014), this process involved selecting, simplifying, organizing, and focusing the data to produce meaningful interpretations. The second stage consisted of thematic categorization, in which the selected data were organized into major themes, including the nature of first language acquisition, nativist theory, interactionist theory, the synthesis of both theories, the acquisition of phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics, and their implications for Arabic language learning. The third stage involved comparative analysis to examine the assumptions, contributions, and limitations of the nativist and interactionist perspectives, identifying areas of convergence, divergence, and potential theoretical integration. The final stage consisted of interpretative synthesis, in which evidence from various sources was integrated to construct a comprehensive explanation of first language acquisition. This synthesis extended beyond simply combining expert opinions by critically relating theoretical perspectives, empirical evidence, the linguistic characteristics of Arabic, and the pedagogical needs of Arabic language instruction.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was employed by comparing information obtained from multiple types of literature, including theoretical books, empirical research articles, and recent scholarly publications. The use of diverse sources helped verify the consistency of the evidence and minimized reliance on a single theoretical perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, referential adequacy and interpretative consistency were maintained throughout the research process. Referential adequacy was ensured by supporting each major argument with relevant and authoritative references, while interpretative consistency was established by continuously aligning the study's conclusions with the analyzed data and theoretical frameworks. Through these procedures, the findings are expected to demonstrate academic rigor, transparency, and credibility.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Innatism Theory in Arabic Language Acquisition in Children

Innate theory is one of the most influential theories in the study of first language acquisition. This theory was developed by Noam Chomsky as a critique of the behaviorist view, which assumes that language is acquired through a process of stimulus, response, and reinforcement. According to Chomsky, behaviorist explanations are unable to explain how children can master a very complex language system in a relatively short time based on only limited linguistic input. Therefore, Chomsky proposed that humans are born with a special biological ability that allows them to acquire language naturally, known as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) (Ambridge et al., 2023; Rowland, 2022).

The central concept of this theory is Universal Grammar (UG), a set of universal linguistic principles biologically embedded in the human mind. Universal Grammar enables children to identify the language patterns they hear and then construct a grammatical system appropriate to the language used in their environment. In other words, language is not merely a result of learning from the environment, but rather the actualization of innate linguistic capacities possessed from birth (Ambridge et al., 2023; Torkildsen et al., 2023).

From a modern Arabic linguistic perspective, the concept of innateism is often associated with the term "al-isti'dād al-lughawī al-fiṭrī" (al-isti'dād al-lughawī al-fiṭrī), which refers to an innate linguistic readiness that allows children to acquire language naturally without formal instruction. This concept gains strong relevance when applied to Arabic, which is known for its complex linguistic system, particularly in its morphological aspects. Arabic uses a system of roots (al-jidhr/الجذر) and patterns (al-wazn/الوزن) that allow for the

formation of multiple words from a single consonantal root. This complexity demands a high level of linguistic abstraction, as children must understand the systematic relationship between roots and their various derivatives (Al-Qasemi & Dromi, 2024; Khattab & Keren-Portnoy, 2025).

Recent research indicates that Arabic-speaking children are able to recognize these morphological patterns from an early age. Al-Qasemi and Dromi (2024) found that children's Arabic morphological development is systematic and demonstrates a generalization ability that cannot be explained solely through imitation. Similar findings were presented by Khattab and Keren-Portnoy (2025), who demonstrated that children gradually develop sensitivity to Arabic morphophonological patterns through cognitive processes that enable them to identify linguistic regularities in the language input they receive. This ability indicates the existence of a mental mechanism that helps children extract abstract linguistic patterns from limited linguistic data.

Support for the theory of innateness is also evident in the phenomenon of uniformity in the stages of language development in children across cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Various studies show that children generally go through relatively similar stages of language development, from babbling, to the production of single words, two-word combinations, to the formation of more complex sentences (Rowland, 2022; Hoff, 2023). This uniformity in developmental patterns suggests a biological basis governing the process of language acquisition, regardless of the differences in the social and cultural environments in which children grow up (Ambridge et al., 2023).

Another argument often used to support the theory of innateness is children's ability to produce new sentences they have never heard before. This phenomenon is known as linguistic creativity. Children do not simply repeat utterances acquired from their environment but are able to create new language structures that adhere to the grammatical rules of the language they use (Massofia et al., 2024; Rowland, 2022). In the Arabic context, this linguistic creativity is evident when children are able to form new words or constructions based on learned morphological patterns, even though these forms were not explicitly taught by adults (Khattab & Keren-Portnoy, 2025).

Furthermore, the theory of innateness also draws support from research on the speed of syntax acquisition in children. Although the syntactic structures of language are often very complex, children are able to master them in a relatively short time without formal explanation of grammatical rules. Recent neurolinguistic research indicates that the development of neural networks related to language processing begins at an early age and provides a biological foundation for the development of children's syntactic competence (Evanson et al., 2025; Husein et al., 2025). These findings further strengthen the assumption that humans possess a biological readiness to acquire language.

A final argument often put forward by proponents of innateness is the critical period hypothesis. This hypothesis states that there is a specific age range when the human brain is optimal for language acquisition. If language exposure is not obtained during this period, language skills will not develop optimally (Evanson et al., 2025; Hoff, 2023). The existence of a critical period indicates that language acquisition has a strong biological basis and cannot be explained solely through environmental factors.

However, various contemporary studies indicate that innate theory is not yet fully able to explain all aspects of language acquisition. The excessive focus on biological factors often ignores the contribution of the social environment and the quality of linguistic input in children's language development (Verhagen & Leseman, 2022; Hoff, 2023). In the Arabic context, the phenomenon of diglossia and variations in language use within the family environment indicate that linguistic experience has a significant influence on the development of children's language competence (Rakhlin et al., 2025; Shahbari-Kassem et al., 2024). Therefore, although innate theory successfully explains aspects of language

creativity and productivity, this theory needs to be combined with a perspective that pays more attention to the role of the environment to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the mechanisms of first language acquisition.

Interactionism Theory (النظرية التفاعلية) in Arabic Language Acquisition

Interactionism theory (al-naẓariyyah al-tafāʻuliyyah/النظرية التفاعلية) is one of the main approaches in the study of first language acquisition, developing in response to the limitations of behaviorism and innateism. While behaviorism overemphasizes the role of the environment and innateism overemphasizes biological factors, interactionism seeks to integrate both aspects into a more comprehensive framework. This theory developed through the thinking of Lev Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner, Michael Halliday, and other social linguists, who believe that language is acquired through a dynamic interaction between a child's biological capacities and the social environment in which language is used (Rowland, 2022; Hoff, 2023; Ambridge et al., 2023).

From an interactionist perspective, children do have the biological potential to acquire language, but this potential will not develop optimally without a social environment that provides adequate linguistic experience. Therefore, language acquisition is viewed as a process of knowledge construction that occurs through continuous communication and social interaction (Hoff, 2023; Verhagen & Leseman, 2022). In the modern Arabic linguistic tradition, this concept is often associated with the term التفاعل اللغوي الاجتماعي (al-tafāʻul al-lughawī al-ijtimāʻī), namely social linguistic interaction that enables children to build language competence through communication with family, society, and the educational environment.

Interactionism theory rests on several main concepts.

linguistic input (al-mudkhalāt al-lughawiyyah/المدخلات اللغوية), which is all forms of language a child receives from their environment. Second, parent-child interaction, which is the primary medium in the process of transferring and negotiating meaning. Third, Bruner's concept of scaffolding, which is the temporary assistance adults provide to children in understanding and using language. Fourth, Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which explains that language development occurs when a child receives support from individuals with higher abilities in a communication activity (Rowland, 2022; Hoff, 2023; Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

In the context of Arabic, interactionism theory has particularly strong relevance because Arabic language acquisition occurs within a complex linguistic environment. Arab children not only encounter complex morphological structures but also the phenomenon of diglossia, a combination of standard Arabic (al-fuṣḥā) and dialectal Arabic (al-ʻāmmiyyah) in their daily lives (Rakhlin et al., 2025; Shahbari-Kassem et al., 2024). This situation makes the quality and intensity of linguistic interaction crucial factors in determining the success of children's language acquisition.

One form of interaction that has received considerable attention in contemporary research is child-directed speech (CDS), or الكلام الموجه للأطفال (al-kalām al-muwajjah lil-aṭfāl). CDS refers to specific communication patterns used by adults when speaking to children, such as the use of simpler sentences, more frequent repetition, clearer intonation, and more easily understood vocabulary (Hoff, 2023; Rowland, 2022). Research by Khattab and Keren-Portnoy (2025) shows that the quality of CDS in Arabic has a significant influence on the development of children's sensitivity to Semitic Arabic morphological patterns. Children who receive rich and structured linguistic exposure demonstrate better abilities in recognizing the relationship between word roots (al-jidhr/الجذر) and morphological patterns (al-wazn/الوزن) than children who receive limited linguistic input (Khattab & Keren-Portnoy, 2025).

The first argument supporting interactionist theory is the finding that children who receive intensive linguistic interaction demonstrate faster language development. Various

studies have shown that the frequency of communication between parents and children is positively correlated with the development of children's vocabulary, syntactic abilities, and pragmatic skills (Hoff, 2023; Verhagen & Leseman, 2022). In the Arabic context, children who grow up in families with high levels of verbal communication tend to have better linguistic abilities than children who experience minimal linguistic interaction (Khattab & Keren-Portnoy, 2025; Shahbari-Kassem et al., 2024).

The second argument relates to the influence of bilingual or multilingual environments on language acquisition. Recent research has shown that children who grow up in environments with more than one language experience different patterns of linguistic development than monolingual children. This variation suggests that the language environment has a direct influence on the development of children's linguistic competence (Verhagen & Leseman, 2022; Rakhlin et al., 2025). In the Arabic context, the phenomenon of diglossia can be viewed as a form of internal bilingualism that influences children's language acquisition strategies from an early age (Shahbari-Kassem et al., 2024).

The third argument is the strong relationship between the quality of linguistic input and the development of children's language abilities. Neurolinguistic research shows that linguistic experience gained through social interaction contributes to the development of neural networks related to language processing (Evanson et al., 2025; Husein et al., 2025). In other words, the environment not only provides language as an object of learning but also plays a role in shaping the biological development that supports language ability.

The fourth argument relates to children's ability to understand the social function of language. Interactionism argues that language is primarily a tool for social communication. Therefore, language acquisition encompasses not only mastery of grammatical structures but also the ability to use language appropriately in various social contexts (Rowland, 2022; Hoff, 2023). This finding is difficult to explain with innatism theory, which focuses more on grammatical competence than on language use in social practice.

Comparative Analysis of Innatism and Interactionism Theories

Aspect	Nativist Theory	Interactionist Theory
Key Proponents	Noam Chomsky	Lev S. Vygotsky, Jerome Bruner
Source of Language Ability	Innate biological endowment	Interaction between biological capacities and social environment
Core Concepts	Language Acquisition Device (LAD), Universal Grammar (UG)	Scaffolding, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), linguistic input
Primary Focus	Mental structures underlying language acquisition	Social interaction and communicative processes in language development
Strengths	Explains children's linguistic creativity and rapid language acquisition	Explains the influence of social interaction and environmental support on language development
Limitations	Pays limited attention to social and environmental contexts	Provides a less comprehensive explanation for the universality of language acquisition

Recent studies tend to integrate these two theories. A number of recent studies suggest that first language acquisition is the result of a collaboration between the innate abilities of the human brain and linguistic experience gained through social interaction.

First Language Acquisition Mechanisms in the Perspective of Modern Arabic Linguistics

language acquisition in Arabic develops through four interconnected stages: phonological, morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic development. During the **phonological stage**, children begin to perceive, distinguish, and produce Arabic speech sounds, including complex pharyngeal and uvular consonants such as **ح (/ḥ/), خ (/kh/), ع (/ʿ/),** dan **غ (/gh/)**. In the **morphological stage**, they acquire the Arabic **root-and-pattern** system, enabling them to understand word formation and generate new lexical forms. The **syntactic stage** involves mastering grammatical structures, including word order, sentence formation, and the **iʿrāb (case-marking)** system, allowing children to produce increasingly complex and grammatically accurate sentences. Finally, during the **pragmatic stage**, children learn to use language appropriately according to social and cultural contexts, acquiring communicative functions such as greetings, requests, gratitude, apologies, and culturally appropriate expressions like *As-salāmu ʿalaykum*, *Alḥamdulillāh*, and *In shāʾ Allāh*. Contemporary research suggests that these four stages are not independent but represent an integrated developmental process resulting from the interaction of innate biological predispositions, neurological maturation, cognitive development, linguistic input, and continuous social interaction. This integrative perspective provides a more comprehensive explanation of Arabic first language acquisition than theories emphasizing either innate mechanisms or environmental influences alone.

Relevance to Modern Arabic Linguistics

The development of modern Arabic linguistics demonstrates a significant paradigm shift from the dichotomous debate between innateism and interactionism to an integrative approach that views both as complementary perspectives. Recent studies no longer question whether language is acquired through innate factors or social environment, but rather seek to explain how these two factors interact to shape children's linguistic competence (Ambridge et al., 2023; Hoff, 2023; Rowland, 2022).

This paradigm shift is increasingly relevant in the context of Arabic, which has complex linguistic characteristics, particularly in terms of root and pattern morphology and the phenomenon of diglossia. Recent research indicates that Arab children are able to productively recognize morphological regularities from an early age, an ability that is difficult to explain through imitation or social learning alone (Al-Qasemi & Dromi, 2024; Khattab & Keren-Portnoy, 2025; Massofia et al., 2024). These findings support the innate assumption that cognitive readiness allows children to perform linguistic abstraction on complex language patterns (Ambridge et al., 2023; Torkildsen et al., 2023).

However, the same empirical evidence also shows that the development of this ability is strongly influenced by the quality of linguistic input, the intensity of family communication, and the forms of child-directed speech a child receives in their social environment (Khattab & Keren-Portnoy, 2025; Hoff, 2023; Verhagen & Leseman, 2022). In other words, innate capacity does not develop automatically, but requires sufficient linguistic experience to actualize into real language competence (Evanson et al., 2025; Husein et al., 2025).

Critically, these findings demonstrate the weakness of a monocausal approach that relies solely on one theory. Innatism tends to struggle to explain variations in language ability that arise from differences in social environments, while interactionism is unable to adequately explain children's ability to construct linguistic generalizations that go beyond the language data they receive (Ambridge et al., 2023; Rowland, 2022; Torkildsen et al., 2023). In the Arabic context, the complexity of the morphological system, dialectal variation, and the reality of diglossia actually demonstrate that language acquisition is the result of a dynamic interaction between biological capacity and socio-linguistic experience (Rakhlin et

al., 2025; Shahbari-Kassem et al., 2024). Therefore, Arabic language acquisition in children is better understood as a multidimensional process involving biological and neurological factors, universal language structures, social interactions, the Arabic cultural environment, and continuous linguistic input (Evanson et al., 2025; Hoff, 2023; Khattab & Keren-Portnoy, 2025; Rakhlin et al., 2025). This synthesis is an important contribution to modern Arabic linguistics because it explains language acquisition more comprehensively, empirically, and contextually than approaches that rely solely on a single theoretical perspective.

First language acquisition is a natural process that enables children to master the language system through the interaction of innate abilities and social experiences. In the Arabic context, this process has special characteristics due to the root-pattern morphology system, complex phonology, and the phenomenon of diglossia between standard Arabic (al-fuṣḥā) and dialects (al-ʻāmmiyyah) (Khattab & Keren-Portnoy, 2025; Rakhlin et al., 2025).

Recent research shows that Arab children are able to recognize morphological and phonological patterns from an early age, even before mastering the entire vocabulary they hear. This ability suggests that language acquisition occurs not only through imitation but also involves cognitive processes that enable children to construct abstract representations of the language system (Ambridge et al., 2023; Al-Qasemi & Dromi, 2024).

Furthermore, the social environment plays a crucial role in children's language development. The quality of family interactions, the frequency of communication, and exposure to standard Arabic and dialects influence the development of children's linguistic competence. The phenomenon of diglossia requires children to understand and use two language varieties simultaneously, making language experience a crucial factor in successful Arabic language acquisition (Shahbari-Kassem et al., 2024; Rakhlin et al., 2025).

Therefore, modern Arabic linguistics views first language acquisition as a multidimensional process involving biological, cognitive, and social factors in an integrated manner. A child's language development cannot be explained solely by innate or environmental factors, but rather through the ongoing interaction of both (Rowland, 2022; Hoff, 2023).

Implications for Arabic Language Learning

First language acquisition shapes the linguistic and conceptual systems that learners use when learning Arabic. The influence of the first language can result in positive transfer or interference. Positive transfer occurs when both languages share similar elements, while interference occurs when the first language's patterns are applied to different Arabic elements (Liu & Dras, 2024; Wang et al., 2022). In phonology, Indonesian speakers often experience difficulties with phonemes that are not found in Indonesian. Fitria and Al Farisi (2023) found interference in the pronunciation of ق by Sundanese and Javanese speakers. Anggrayani (2025) also identified difficulties with several Arabic sounds and the distinction between long and short vowels.

In morphology and syntax, learners encounter gender, number, verb inflection, definiteness, and sentence element agreement. Solehudin and Arisandi (2024) showed that first language interference can occur in phonology, morphology, and syntax. Mubarok et al. (2025) also found errors in gender congruence, verb use, the letter jar, and the structures kāna and inna. These findings suggest that learning rules is not sufficient through explanation. Declarative knowledge of grammar must be transformed into skills through production practice. Learners may be able to state rules, but they may not be able to apply them in speaking or writing.

The first language need not be completely prohibited. Indonesian can be used to activate prior knowledge, compare structures, explain abstract concepts, and provide feedback. However, its use must be controlled and directed towards improving Arabic processing skills. Sari et al. (2024) showed that the use of translanguaging can foster understanding and metalinguistic awareness if Arabic remains the primary input and output. Uddin (2024) also found that the use of multilingual resources in feedback can help learners understand errors and maintain learning engagement.

Based on this synthesis, Arabic language instruction should adopt several integrated principles. First, learners' first language should be viewed as a cognitive foundation rather than merely a source of errors. Second, contrastive analysis should be applied selectively to linguistic features that genuinely present learning difficulties. Third, instruction should combine rich linguistic input, meaningful communicative interaction, pattern-based practice, and opportunities for language production. Fourth, learners' errors should be analyzed according to their underlying causes, including first-language transfer, overgeneralization of grammatical rules, limited vocabulary, or insufficient language exposure. Fifth, the use of Indonesian should be gradually reduced as learners' Arabic proficiency develops. Finally, curricula and instructional materials should be designed in accordance with the linguistic characteristics of Indonesian learners. By implementing these principles, Arabic language learning moves beyond the mere memorization of grammatical rules toward the development of a functional linguistic system that enables learners to use Arabic accurately, fluently, and appropriately in diverse communicative contexts.

CONCLUSION

The mechanism of first language acquisition in children cannot be explained through an approach that relies solely on innate or environmental factors separately. Innate theory successfully reveals the biological capacity that enables children to acquire language relatively quickly and systematically, but it is less able to explain variations in language development influenced by social context. In contrast, interactionist theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction as a medium for actualizing children's linguistic potential, but tends to ignore the universal aspects inherent in human language ability. From a modern Arabic linguistic perspective, these two theories should not be positioned dichotomously, but rather understood as complementary frameworks. Thus, first language acquisition is a multidimensional process that arises from the dynamic interaction between biological predispositions and children's socio-linguistic experiences. This integrative understanding provides a more comprehensive foundation for explaining children's language development than reductionist approaches.

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