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Report on Doctoral Seminars in Psycholinguistics

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Abstract: The field of Psycholinguistics is receiving a considerable amount of attention due to its applicability in Applied Linguistics, as it relates to the language learning process. In order to be able to determine how language is acquired and produced, it is necessary to understand the origins of language and those factors that play an important part in its development. Bearing in mind the above, this present work seeks to report on issues addressed in the curricular unit DCL 006 – Psycholinguistics I, one of the courses offered in the PhD Programme in Language Sciences/Language Didactics of the University of Porto, Portugal. A brief discussion ensues on important themes, materials and information presented during the course seminars, with a view to shedding light on the necessity of psycholinguistic study for language development, acquisition and production.

Keywords: psycholinguistics, language, language development, language acquisition, language production, speech.

Resumen: El ámbito de la Psicolingüística está recibiendo una atención notoria debido a su aplicabilidad a la lingüística aplicada, en lo concerniente al proceso de aprendizaje de lenguas. A fin de poder determinar cómo se adquiere y produce el lenguaje, es menester comprender los orígenes del lenguaje y aquellos factores que juegan un papel importante en su desarrollo. Acorde con lo anteriormente señalado, este presente paper tiene como finalidad informar sobre los asuntos más destacados de la unidad curricular DCL 006 – Psicolingüística I, uno de los cursos ofrecidos en el Programa de Doctorado en Ciencias del Lenguaje/Didáctica de Lenguas de la Universidad de Porto, Portugal. Se da una breve discusión sobre aquellos materiales, información y temáticas importantes, los cuales fueron presentados a lo largo de los seminarios del curso, con el propósito de arrojar luz sobre la necesidad del estudio psicolingüístico para el desarrollo, adquisición y producción del lenguaje.

Palabras clave: psicolingüística, lenguaje, desarrollo del lenguaje, adquisición del lenguaje, producción del lenguaje, discurso.
1. Introduction

‘Linguistics’ is the scientific study of human language which seeks to look at language form, language meaning, and language in context. In other words, it studies all aspects of language which include Phonetics, Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics and Pragmatics. ‘Psychology’ is the scientific study of the human mind and its functions, especially those that affect behaviour in specific contexts. These two scientific terms, Linguistics and Psychology, have been fused to form the new term Psycholinguistics.

In simple terms, Psycholinguistics, also referred to as the psychology of language, is concerned with the nature of the computations and processes that the brain undergoes to comprehend and produce language (Field, 2004). In other words, it is the relationship between linguistic behaviours and psychological processes, including the process of language acquisition. It studies the psychological aspects of language.

2. Important Themes, Materials and Information Presented

A number of different issues were presented and discussed in the DCL 006 – Psycholinguistics I seminars (a course offered in the PhD Programme in Language Sciences/Language Didactics of the University of Porto, Portugal), with specific reference to some of the works of two of the most important figures in Developmental Psychology, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. In addition to these, some other materials were presented in support of language development, acquisition and learning. These are discussed below.

2.1 Piaget and Child Language Development

Jean Piaget (1896-1980), employed at the Binet Institute in the 1920’s, had the primary task of developing the French equivalent of English intelligence test questions. He was fascinated with some of the reasons for children giving incorrect answers to these questions that demanded logical thinking. His belief was that those wrong answers highlighted critical thinking pattern differences between adults and children.
Piaget (1928, 1932, 1936, 1967) was the first psychologist to make a systematic study of cognitive development. Piaget’s most notable works include his theory of cognitive child development, detailed observational studies of cognition in children, and a series of simple but clever tests to reveal different cognitive abilities. It was assumed, before Piaget’s time, that children were not as competent in their thinking as compared to adults. With Piaget’s work, he was able to demonstrate that children do not think in the same way as adults, and that they are born with a genetically inherited and evolved mental structure upon which all subsequent learning and knowledge is based (Sinclair, 1974).

Piaget’s theory differs from many other theories that were in circulation during his time because: (1) It is concerned with children, rather than all learners; (2) It focuses on development, and (3) It proposes discrete stages of development. The objective of this theory is to elucidate, though hypothesis, the mechanisms and processes which allow for the cognitive development from infancy upwards. To Piaget, cognitive development was a continuous restructuring of mental processes, brought about through biological maturation and environmental experience (Piaget, 1967; Sinclair, 1974). It is important to highlight that children construct an understanding of the world that surrounds them; subsequent to this, they experience inconsistencies what is already known and what is discovered.

There are three basic components to Piaget’s Cognitive Theory, and these are: (1) Schemas, or building blocks of knowledge, (2) Adaptation Processes that enable the movement from one stage to the next (equilibrium, assimilation, and accommodation), and (3) Stages of Development. These stages of development are the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and the formal operational (Piaget 1923, 1945, 1952; McCune-Nicholich & Carroll, 1981; Siegler, DeLoache & Eisenberg, 2003; Wadsworth, 2004). It was Piaget’s firm belief that each of the four stages of development were universal, and that no child ever skipped over any of these steps.

2.2 Chapter 8 of Piaget’s (1945) Book
In Chapter 8 of Piaget’s (1945) book, which deals with the transition from sensorimotor schemas to conceptual schemas, this author uses a number of
examples, through clinical tests of his own children and some of his friends’ children, to corroborate his position on child language development. In this chapter, one gets to see the relationships between these schemas and adaptation processes in the stages of child development. The baby first acquires and uses sensorimotor skills to familiarise himself with the world around him. As time progresses, the child develops his first verbal schemas. These correspond to a symbol or image that the child has of something. Between the verbal schemas stage and the preconcept stage, the child begins to ‘recount’. This recounting signals the beginning of memory. During this period also, there is use of semi-signs, ludic symbols, images and words. Piaget (1945) continues highlighting the movement from the preconcept stage to the child’s first preconceptual reasonings, also referred to as transduction, and symbolic reasoning. In other words, the child’s mental development is progressing from sensorimotor intelligence to cognitive representation. With the passage of time, the child begins to develop cognitive functions, in that there is a movement from centration of perception to decentration, and from egocentrism of thought to logical reciprocity. From sensorimotor assimilation and accommodation, the child eventually develops operational assimilation and accommodation which further develops into logical systems.

2.3 McCune-Nicolich and Carroll’s (n/d) Article
In relation to Piaget (1945), McCune-Nicolich and Carroll (n/d) discuss the importance of pretend play and its relevance to child language development. The paper (1) highlights the movement from sensorimotor to symbolic functioning of both play and language, occurring in the first two years of the child’s life, and (2) focuses on pretend play beyond two years of age and offers suggestions for assessment and intervention strategies through the use of play.

McCune-Nicolich and Carroll (n/d)’s article, in keeping with Piaget (1945), has serious implications for the language specialist, especially those who are engaged in child language development. While the paper addresses the language development of young children, the principles and concepts can be applied to language teaching in general, since it is the teacher’s responsibility to always find interesting ways to engage students, causing them to have significant educational experiences.
McCune-Nicolich and Carroll (n/d) discuss a number of vital issues, some of which are briefly presented. The first intelligence of the child is very *practical*, since he is heavily engaged in actions, specifically sensorimotor activities: perception and movement. Play has many facets. It is important for a child to be able to know how to play with the instruments or objects before they engage in pretend play. In pretend play, the child uses his imagination, where he utilises objects for other purposes than intended. This is referred to as the decontextualisation of objects and activities to suit the pretend play situation. “The child’s use of objects in pretend play can be used as a key to understanding the child’s concepts concerning the meanings of both objects and words” (McCune-Nicolich & Carroll n/d: 14).

When a child imitates someone or something, during pretend play, it unequivocally means that the child has been doing an excellent job of *observing* these actions being performed by adults. This emphasises that the young child does have the ability to imitate and accommodate as desired. Additionally, the way that a child plays games “may reveal insights about his language capacity” (McCune-Nicolich & Carroll n/d: 12). It shows how social interactions can, to a great extent, determine language development. In other words, symbolic play is important for cognitive and social development. The various stages of play of recognition and symbolic play are critical as they shed valuable light on child development. Play is also very important for literacy development in children (Pinto, 2010).

Another important concept highlighted by these authors is *role play*. Sociodramatic play is important here, since it involves playing with social roles, and the negotiation of these roles in play. Schwartzman (1979), cited in McCune-Nicholich and Carroll (n/d: 16), suggests that “children are chosen for the roles of play based on real-life characteristics”. Not all children are assertive. Not all children are comfortable with leading roles. Some children are just too involved in their own world, even after a certain period when they should stop that. That is extreme, and such children may be considered as being *autistic*. Just as their faces differ, so do their characteristics. All of these issues need to be taken into account. These should be carefully considered when the teacher is delegating characters for role play activities, as well as for assessment and intervention procedures.
In relation to the above, symbolic play is important for evaluating language capacities and behaviours in these contexts, as well as for intervention. McCune-Nicholich and Carroll (n/d) outline a number of steps that can be taken to address evaluation and intervention. For ‘normal’ children, toys can be used. As cited in McCune-Nicholich and Carroll (n/d), Westby (1980) described an observational measure used to assess children as old as five years old. Lowe and Costello (1976) designed a language-free measure of play for ages 12 to 36 months. For language-impaired children, as in autistic children, play can be used as an intervention technique, which will allow the child to have enjoyable experiences, leading to linguistic and social competence. For this to be successful, it is important for the play intervention strategies to begin with the skills and interests of the child (McCune-Nicholich and Carroll, n/d). Through the techniques used, the child should be as relaxed with language as is possible, consequently helping him to build his linguistic and social skills as player and speaker. Children who suffer from dynamic aphasia (Luria & Tsvetkova, 1968), another speech disorder, can be given various types of cues to help them overcome language difficulties.

2.4 DCL 006 Psycholinguistics I – Classroom Observation

Emanating from the whole notion of game and pretend play and its importance for child language and development, a little experiment was conducted in the DCL 006 class using a 9 year old child. This child, a boy, is the son of a course colleague. The first activity was a game done with the child, where the course lecturer drew shapes on the whiteboard, with different spacing in between them, and asked the child to determine if the different shapes were all equal in number. At first, the child knew at once that the numeric value of all objects were the same; however, due to the leading questions from the course lecturer about some objects occupying more space than some, the child became unsure. After serious thinking and self-questioning, the child was able to correctly determine that, despite the difference of space between the objects, they were of the same numeric quantity. At this age, children have already acquired this variant of ‘quantification’.

A pretend play activity was conducted with the same child, using toys (dolls, truck, and a car). The course lecturer asked the child to demonstrate, through actions, that he understood what the task required him to do. In order to see of the child
understood, the course lecturer uttered statements in both the active and passive voices. In certain instances, there was apprehension from the child. Eventually the child was able to figure out what was to be done, and completed all of the activities. A notable thing that the child did was to repeat everything that the course lecturer said, before attempting the task, and even during task realisation. This alludes to the fact that repetition is also very important for language development. Through repetition, the child learns words and concepts, and his linguistic skills are sharpened (phonology, syntax, semantics, and the like) (Pinto, 2010).

2.5 Vygotsky and Child Language Development
The work of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) has become the foundation of much research and theory in cognitive development over the past several decades, particularly of what has become known as Social Development Theory (SDT). Vygotsky’s (1978) theory highlights the pivotal role of social interaction in the development of cognition as he believed strongly that community plays a central role in the process of ‘making meaning’. Vygotsky developed a sociocultural approach to cognitive development. His emphasis was on the necessity of social contributions for development. Important to note is that similarly to Piaget, Vygotsky’s (1934) belief was that young children were very actively and keenly involved in their own learning and development.

Vygotsky (1978) stressed the critical role of social interaction played in child development. He affirmed that “learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of development, culturally organized, specifically human psychological function” (p. 35). In other words, socio-cultural contexts are pivotal factors in children’s development; in fact, as espoused by Vygostky, social processes exert a principal role in developing higher mental processes. His view is a sharp contradiction to Piaget’s view of formal and specific stages of development.

According to Vygotsky (1978), when the child interacts with a skilled tutor, learning and development takes place. The tutor gives verbal instructions to the child, in addition to modeling certain behaviours. This is termed as ‘cooperative dialogue’ or ‘collaborative dialogue’. The child attempts to comprehend the tutor’s instructions, internalising the information and using it to guide and regulate his performance. To
this end, Vygotsky (1978) derived the term *Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)*, which he explained as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development to determine through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.” (p. 33). Assistance by an adult or a peer is referred to by Vygostky (1978) as the *More Knowledgeable Other (MKO)*.

Bearing in mind the afore-mentioned, Vygotsky recognised that there are four basic mental functions common in everyone: attention, *attention, sensation, perception* and *memory*. The way in which each of these develops is primarily dependent on the socio-cultural and educational habits of beliefs, values, and cultural tools that aid intellectual development. The right educational context must be constructed for child development to occur, through the ZPD and the MKO. As posited by Vygotsky (1978), language cannot be separated from cognitive development, since the development of thought is closely and intricately connected to language. This is a just view, since the greatest tool that man has at his disposal is language, the medium through which information is passed to children. In essence, Vygostky puts the emphasis firmly on the social, cultural, educational and linguistic environment of the child.

Though some of Vygotsky’s (1978) theories seem to overlap with Piaget’s, there are also certain differences in them. They are as follows:

1. More emphasis is placed on culture and how it affects and shapes cognitive development; in fact, this is a sharp contradiction to Piaget’s view that deals with those universal stages of development that transcend cultures. Vygotsky does not refer to these stages, but rather purports that cognitive development is dependent upon culture.

2. Social factors contribute to cognitive development, as noted by Vygotsky. He criticises Piaget for his underestimation of this vital component. For Vygotsky, cognitive development is as a result of social interactions from guided learning within the ZPD and the MKOs. Piaget maintained that cognitive development emanates from independent activities, allowing for knowledge to be self-
constructed. Vygostky did not agree with this, establishing that children’s socio-cultural environment influenced their thought processes.

3. Vygotsky stresses on the role of language in learning and development. Once more, he criticised Piaget for his lack of treatment and emphasis on this vital issue. Cognitive development, as endorsed by Vygotsky, results from language internalisation.

4. Piaget contends that language is dependent on thought for its development; in other words, thought precedes language. In Vygotsky’s view, however, thought and language are originally distinct separate systems, from birth, which merge when the child is about three years old, thus resulting in verbal thought (inner speech).

2.6 Language and Thought OR Thought and Language?
Both Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky studied child language acquisition. Both were interested in the relationship that existed between thinking and language learning. Piaget was of the view that the child learned through action. It is his belief that children are born with, and acquire, schemas that direct how they behave and how they respond to their environment. As children begin to explore their surroundings, they structure and restructure mental ideas. The level of knowledge of their surroundings is usually gained, depending on how actively involved they are.

Vygotsky’s (1934) book on thought and language was published just over a decade after Piaget’s (1923) book on child language and thought. Vygotsky studied the behavioural patterns of chimpanzees and arrived at the conclusion that thought and speech emerge from distinct processes, subsequently mutating in parallel, but independently of each other. The close association between thought and speech is exclusive to (adult) human beings. When children are born, they initially operate like chimpanzees: there is no relation between language and thought; language is irrational and thought is non-verbal. They are able to learn the names of objects only at an appointed time, or when adults tell them. At some point, the child’s attitude evolves, in that it is the very child who becomes curious about the names of objects. With time, the child’s vocabulary begins to gradually and dramatically increase, with
very little prompting from adults. The inquisitive child has learned that objects possess names. At this pivotal point in child language development, thought and speech combine.

In his book, Vygostky (1934) dedicates an entire chapter to discussing the issues raised in Piaget’s (1923) book. It was only after more than two decades after the death of Vygotsky, Piaget (1962) sought to comment on Vygostky’s critical remarks to his book on child language and thought. Vygotsky redraws from Piaget’s theory of egocentric speech (the kind of speech that is self-centred) in pre-school children. The child becomes cognizant of his actions only when he is interrupted. Speech results from the awareness of one’s actions. The egocentric child is not excluded: his speech signals that he is aware of what he is doing, after his action is thwarted. Said differently, the child is thinking aloud. In a few years time, that process become silent: in order to solve a problem, the child’s ‘thinking’ is no longer aloud, but has rather evolved into an inner conversation. Vygostky (1934) firmly believes that upon the disappearance of egocentric speech, it still does exist, however it has moved inside. The reason for it no longer being ‘vocal’ is that its social function has been removed; in other others, it is not necessary for it to be heard by other people. In Piaget’s (1923) view, social speech emerges after egocentric speech disappears. Vygotsky, however, affirms that speech is initially social in nature, and that egocentric speech is a manifestation of it, especially when the child has to reflect. In other words, egocentric speech emerges from social speech, which eventually transitions into silent thought. Cognitive faculties are internalised versions of social processes.

Vygotsky (1987) makes a distinction between three kinds of speeches: (1) social speech, which is external language use for communicative purposes (from about 2 yrs old); (2) private speech, which is self-directed, serving an intellectual function (from about 3 yrs old); and (3) inner speech, which results from private speech going underground, diminishing in audibility, and taking on a self-regulating function (from about 7 yrs old). In this regard, Vygotsky was the first psychologist to ever document the critical nature of private speech. To him, private speech was a point of evolution between social and inner speech, the period in the child’s development when
language and thought merge to form verbal thinking. In other words, private speech was the earliest expression of inner speech.

2.7 The Development of Scientific and Spontaneous Concepts

One very important theme addressed in the DCL 006 sessions centred on scientific and spontaneous concepts. Quite often, and as seen from the literature, there has been frequent comparison of the perspectives of Piaget (1923) and Vygotsky (1934) with reference to the development of scientific and spontaneous concepts, since both authors recognised the active role of humans in knowledge construction.

Piaget’s cognitive theory hinged on a biological context (Piaget 1936, 1952, 1967; Sinclair, 1974; Pinto, 2011). From all appearances, it seemed that Piaget was more concerned with spontaneous concepts. In his work, he noted that the development of formal reasoning and scientific concepts was dependent on the child experiencing cognitive conflict, promoting an imbalance and forcing the emergence of successive new assimilations. Vygotsky (1934) was primarily concerned with showing that the development of higher mental functions was related principally to biological and not social laws, thus being historical. Vygotsky was of the view that assimilating new information did not have to wait for a specific or appropriate developmental level; in fact, it is this new information that should produce development.

Both scientific and spontaneous concepts emerge as a result of progressive interaction between individuals and do not develop from cognitive conflicts between two thought processes. These concepts pertain to a dialectal unity and are organised together along different paths: spontaneous concepts move from the concrete to the abstract, while scientific concepts move from the abstract to the concrete (Wellings, 2003; Pinto, 2010). Spontaneous concepts are principally inductive and non-systematic, basing themselves on perceptual attributes. They epitomise basic aspects of real experiences and are infused with life and dynamics. Scientific concepts, on the other hand, provide structure. They proceed downwards via the involvement of spontaneous concepts, and spontaneous concepts proceed upwards with the involvement of scientific concepts (Wellings, 2003; Pinto, 2011; Alves, 2014). In essence, when children are able to use scientific concepts, they are able to
grasp their environs, prospectively and retrospectively understanding the dynamics involved in human achievement.

Since children’s attention is, more often than not, directed towards an object, Vygostsky (1934) was of the view that children operated spontaneously with everyday concepts. When everyday concepts are applied in isolation, individuals only manage to grasp immediate reality. On the contrary, scientific concepts require a specific attitude of the subject to the object, paving the way for the upward movement of these everyday concepts. Forming a conceptual system points them out as arbitrary concepts (Alves, 2014). This therefore follows that a collaborative effort between student and teacher allows for the fostering of higher psychological functions and eventual intellectual development. In other words, teachers introduce these scientific concepts explicitly in the educational setting. They do not emerge directly from contact with everyday concepts. As espoused by Vygotsky (1934), good teaching puts itself one step ahead of spontaneous development, directing and guiding the student to those activities that foster scientific reasoning.

2.8 Multisensory and Multicognitive Approaches to Teaching Pronunciation

Another important issue discussed in the DCL 006 sessions was Odisho’s (2007) article on teaching pronunciation through multi-sensory, multi-cognitive approaches (MMA), with specific reference to foreign language learning. There are many ways of teaching pronunciation and the results are dependent on the specific method selected, on the learner’s personality, and on the suitability of that method for the learner.

2.8.1 Origins of the Multiple Intelligence Theory

In 1904, the French Ministry of Education commissioned the French psychologist, Alfred Binet, to develop a method to determine which primary school students could be “at risk” of failing at school. The objective was to avoid such a collapse. Those intelligence tests reached the USA, dispersing the idea that human beings possess a kind of intelligence measured by an intelligence quotient (IQ). Some eight years later, Gardner, a Harvard psychologist, set out on a different agenda. His aim was to extend the scope of potential human being beyond that IQ. Gardner (1993) suggested that the word ‘intelligence’ dealt with the following two capacities: (1)
solving problems, and (2) creating products with a rich, naturalistic environment. He developed his theory as a cognitive model, which sought to depict how individuals used their different capabilities to solve problems and to create products.

Subsequently, Gardner (1993) was able to define eight intelligences necessary for learning: (1) linguistic intelligence; (2) logical-mathematical intelligence; (3) visual-spatial intelligence; (4) bodily-kinaesthetic intelligence; (5) musical intelligence; (6) interpersonal intelligence; (7) intrapersonal intelligence, and (8) naturalistic intelligence. Although he described intelligences separately, for the sake of comprehension, Gardner (1993) addressed the interrelation and interrelatedness of each cerebral system with the rest of them as a relevant aspect of his theory. In essence, the way the brain works is a key factor that cannot be overlooked. Multiple intelligences always interact in our brain.

### 2.8.2 Bloom’s Learning Domains

Bloom (1948) discovered three different domains to be significant in the learning process: (1) the Cognitive domain (mental skills); (2) the Affective domain (feelings and emotions), and (3) the Psychomotor domain (physical skills). Subsequent to this, he developed a taxonomy of learning objectives, known as the Bloom’s Taxonomy, which teachers set for students within the educational context. Carbo, Dunn and Dunn (1986) classify learning styles into five types, each containing minor elements: (a) immediate environment, (b) own emotionality, (c) sociological needs, (d) physical characteristics and (e) psychological inclinations. These learning domains coincide with Garner’s (1993) multiple intelligences. These domains are pivotal to multisensory and multicognitive learning.

### 2.8.3 Multisensory and Multicognitive Learning

Multisensory learning proposes that learning is done by means of our five senses, through our capability to touch, taste, see, smell and hear. This way of knowledge acquisition from the world around us is part of us. In scientific words, it is engraved in our genome and, in addition, it is completely free. Based on perceptual strengths, Carbo et al. (1986) divide learning styles into four different kinds: kinaesthetic learners, tactual, visual, and auditory. Auditory learners learn easily by listening and remembering what they hear. Visual learners learn by seeing and remember what is
read and seen. Tactual learners makes use of their hands and fingers, writing notes, drawing, or just moving their fingers to help them to remember. Kinaesthetic learners learn by a combination of tactual and kinaesthetic experiences and need plenty of doing and involvement.

Odisho (2003, 2007) has pointed out the importance of using different senses in learning pronunciation. Odisho (2003, 2007), who promotes a multicognitive and a multisensory approach, states that teachers need to pay closer attention to the different sensory modalities, and to the various verbal and non-verbal gestures associated with the production of speech. Some techniques Odisho (2007) describes are kinaesthetic. These help the learner to make differences between sounds (voiced/voiceless). Techniques described by Odisho (2003) include comparisons of humming as against exhalation of air, prolongation of certain speech sounds, dramatisation of the marked differences between articulating two sounds, and the use of colours and pictures and placing fingers in front of the lips to feel the puff-of-air in pronouncing aspirated sounds.

There are different kinds of procedures for teaching sounds, as revealed by Odisho’s (2003, 2007) multicognitive and multisensory approach. These procedures constitute separate phases dedicated to each sense. Learners pass through all of the phases and, consequently, utilise all of their senses while learning pronunciation. Cognitive orientation, the first phase, includes watching facial gestures and doing exercises with minimal pairs. This is followed by auditory, visual and kinaesthetic orientation. Cognitive reinforcement comes after these phases, after the brain would have processed the corresponding information. Finally, the internalisation and follow-up procedures are done, where, through rehearsal, the sound impression passes from the sensory to short-term memory and further into long-term memory.

2.9 Myths and Misconceptions about Second Language Learning

The final issue discussed during the DCL 006 sessions was the article by McLaughlin (1992), which deals with the myths and misconceptions that teachers have about second and foreign language learning. McLaughlin (1992) cites five unfounded assumptions about language learning that can give teachers unrealistic
expectations of the language-acquisition process in the classroom. Nunan (1999, 2004) also rejects these myths. These are:

1. *Children learn second languages quickly and easily* - Contrary to popular belief, the language learning process is arguably lengthy and difficult, and this does not exclude children (Cameron 2001, 2003). It is important to note that no one should expect immediate, incredible results from language learners. For students to become proficient, they must go through several stages that take years. Research indicates that children have no biological advantage in learning languages, although social factors may favor child learners. Pinker (1994) reveals that acquisition is certain for children up to the age of six years, and then it is steadily compromised until shortly after puberty. Other researchers (Genesee, 1981; Harley, 1989; Newport, 1990) believe that the critical period is controversial. Unlike adults, however, children do not have the command of vocabulary or memory techniques to help them easily acquire proficiency in a second language. There is empirical evidence to support that adults can learn languages as successfully as children (Ellis, 2005; Livingstone, 2014).

2. *The younger the child, the more skilled he or she will be in acquiring a second language* - In this regard, it must be said that children of different age groups have their own advantages and disadvantages, bringing their own appropriate skills to the language learning process. Studies have found that older children are better language learners in an educational setting, but that it is possible for the younger child to have an advantage in acquiring correct pronunciation (Hammer, 2001; Cameron, 2003). Children, aged nine or ten, do not learn in the same way as older children do (Harmer, 2001). Young learners respond to meaning even if they do not understand certain words and they often learn indirectly rather than directly (Harmer, 2001). With children, we need to use more realia and body language. In the case of young learners, Halliwell (1992) adds that it is impossible for children to spend all their time sitting still in rows or even talking to the teacher since children like to discover new things and like to use their imagination.

3. *The more time students spend in a second language context, the quicker they learn the language* - On the contrary, studies of immersion programmes indicate that
time on task provides no advantage in second language acquisition. Simply placing students in a second language environment in hopes that the students will learn it through osmosis is not enough. The language must be used in such a way that students understand the messages. To access the messages, students rely on context, knowledge of the world, and other clues including gestures, examples, illustrations, and caretaker language. According to Krashen, (1987), students acquire more language when they are exposed to language which is comprehensible and just slightly above their current level of competence. A study conducted by Cummins (1981) shows that children who were taught in bilingual classes acquired the same language skills equivalent to their peers taught in English classes only. This indicates that young children around the world share similar language learning abilities in both environments.

4. *Children have acquired a second language once they can speak it* - It is easy to assume that if students can converse comfortably in a second language, they can read and write the second language with equal ease. However, there is much more involved in learning a second language than learning how to speak it. While students may be able to participate in oral communication, their language use is oftentimes limited to social exchanges. In reality, proficiency in face-to-face communication does not imply the more complex cognitive proficiency that is required in classroom activities. Learning a second language needs time and effort from the teachers and their students, no matter how much children are quite talented orally. It is not easy to teach children effectively (Harmer, 2001; Cameron 2001, 2003). Additionally, acquiring a second language implies proficiency in all four language skills.

5. *All children learn a second language in the same way* - Diverse styles of learning and cultural communication methods impact on the language learning process, as happens with other kinds of learning. As with first language acquisition, students follow the same process for language development, but they learn a second language at different rates and in different ways. This also applies to language minority students from different cultural backgrounds who may experience additional conflict in school because their ways of learning and communicating may be different from the ways of their peers (Krashen, 1987; Richards & Rodgers, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007). Therefore, a good teacher will include a variety of instructional activities
ranging from demonstrations, group and pair work, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, individualised instruction, and other strategies which take into account the variety of experiences and cultural backgrounds of second language learners.

3. Concluding Remarks
This report has centred its attention on the most important issues discussed during the DCL 006 course. These issues presented in this report are all very vital to effective pedagogical practices, with respect to language learning and teaching. They have shed valuable light on the intricacies involved not only in child language development, but also in adult language learning. It gives a panoramic view of the psychology of language in human beings, with a view to understanding how language is developed, acquired, learnt and produced.

When I was doing my first Master’s Degree (Applied Linguistics), I was given the opportunity to do a course in Psycholinguistics as an optional course. I chose another course over than one, thinking to myself that it sounded difficult. I really did not see the need to do it. Six years later, the course presented itself again – in the form of DCL 006. This time around, I decided to seize the opportunity since I knew deep within that such a course would be of primary importance to me and my field of specialisation, Language Didactics.

The DCL 006 course has been fulfilling, to a great degree, and I have been able to grasp many concepts. Even though the course did not specifically hinge on Psycholinguistics and language teaching for adults, I have been able to relate those principles that would be of benefit to me, in my academic endeavours. There are still some areas that I have to fortify, so as to fully appreciate them. The works of Piaget have not always been easy to understand. To my mind, Vygostky’s writings are more readily and easily understood. That, perhaps, could be due to the fact that I am still a novice in Psycholinguistics. It should get better with time.

Psycholinguistics is here to stay, whether language teachers wish to accept that reality or not. Its pertinence to language development, language acquisition, language learning and language teaching has also been established. The only wise choice would be to embrace it. Embracing it would assist us all in becoming better
teachers, thus sparking learner enthusiasm, and helping our students to have more meaningful educational experiences that would set the foundation for lifelong learning.

References

Bloom, B. (1948): Teaching by Discussion. Chicago, IL: College of the University of Chicago.


