

Cerebral Palsy as a Challenge to Children's Language Acquisition: A Psycholinguistic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a neurological disorder that can affect a child's motor and cognitive development, including language acquisition. From a psycholinguistic perspective, language acquisition in children with CP is a challenge in itself due to limitations in motor, sensory, and cognitive aspects that impact the ability to speak, understand, and produce language. This article discusses how neurological and environmental factors play a role in the language acquisition of children with CP as well as intervention strategies that can support their language development. With a psycholinguistic approach, this study examines various factors that influence language acquisition in children with CP, including the involvement of certain brain areas, communication adaptation, and the use of assistive technology. The results of the discussion show that a multidisciplinary approach involving speech therapy, early language stimulation, and social support can help children with CP develop their language skills.

Keywords: cerebral palsy, language acquisition, psycholinguistics, neurological disorders, child development

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the fundamental aspects in a child's development, which enables them to communicate, express their thoughts, and interact with their social environment. Language acquisition in children generally takes place gradually and is influenced by various factors, including biological, cognitive, social, and environmental factors (Aulina, 2019). However, for children with neurodevelopmental conditions such as Cerebral Palsy (CP), the language acquisition process can be a challenge. The motor disorders experienced by children with CP can affect their ability to speak clearly, while cognitive and sensory factors can also impact their understanding and use of language. In addition, limited social interaction due to physical or communication barriers can slow down their language development. Therefore, the right intervention approach, such as speech therapy, the use of assistive communication technology, and support from the social and family environment, is very important in helping children with CP develop language skills optimally.

Cerebral Palsy is a neurological disorder that occurs due to brain damage in early development, which can affect movement, muscle coordination, and often speech and language abilities. (Timansah & Nurhadiyati, 2024). Children with CP may experience various obstacles in language acquisition, such as difficulty in sound production due to weak motor control, impaired language comprehension due to cognitive or sensory



limitations, and limitations in social interaction due to the communication challenges they face. These barriers can impact their ability to communicate their needs, express their feelings, and participate in social activities, which in turn affects their social and emotional development. In addition, lack of access to a supportive environment, lack of verbal interaction with others, and limitations in the use of communication aids can further slow down the process of language acquisition. Therefore, early intervention that includes speech therapy, the use of assistive technology such as alternative and augmentative communication (AAC), and support from family and professionals is very important to help children with CP develop language skills and improve their quality of life.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, language acquisition in children with cerebral palsy (CP) is an interesting topic to study because it involves a complex relationship between cognitive, neurological, and linguistic aspects. Psycholinguistics itself is a branch of science that studies the relationship between mental processes and language, including how humans understand, produce, and acquire language. In children with CP, disorders of the central nervous system can affect various aspects of language acquisition, from phonology, morphology, syntax, to pragmatics. Difficulty in sound production and articulatory coordination often impedes speaking ability, while cognitive impairment can impact language processing, such as understanding word meaning and sentence structure (Angraini, 2018). In addition, limitations in social interaction due to communication challenges can also slow the development of their pragmatic skills. By understanding how children with CP acquire language, we can gain deeper insights into the complex mechanisms of language acquisition, including how the brain overcomes obstacles in linguistic processing. Research in the field of psycholinguistics can also help identify effective strategies to support the communication development of children with CP, such as the application of language-based therapy, the use of assistive communication technology, and interventions that optimize their neuroplasticity potential. This approach aims not only to improve the language abilities of children with CP but also to strengthen their involvement in social interactions and improve the overall quality of life.

Previous research has shown that children with Cerebral Palsy (CP) often experience delays in mastering various aspects of language, including phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics. Difficulty in sound production and articulation can hinder their phonological development, while cognitive challenges can impact their understanding of grammar and more complex sentence structures. In addition, limitations in social interaction due to motor and communication impairments can also affect pragmatic aspects, such as the ability to speak contextually and understand social cues in conversation.

Some factors that contribute to language acquisition in children with CP include the severity of motor disorders that affect speech control, the presence of hearing or cognitive impairments that can slow down language processing, and the support provided by the environment, including the role of family, educators, and therapists in communication stimulation. A lack of intervention or an environment that is unresponsive to a child's communication needs can exacerbate language delays and limit their participation in social activities. Therefore, early intervention is very important in optimizing the language development of children with CP. Approaches involving speech therapy can help improve articulation and sound production skills, while the use of assistive communication technologies, such as alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) based devices, enable children with CP to express themselves more effectively. In addition, intervention programs based on communication stimulation in social and academic contexts have been proven to accelerate language acquisition and improve the quality of social interactions of children with CP. With a

holistic and evidence-based approach, it is hoped that children with CP can develop better communication skills, which ultimately support their independence and participation in daily life (Paramansyah & Parojai, 2024).

However, challenges remain in fully understanding how children with Cerebral Palsy (CP) acquire their language, especially in more complex aspects such as language use in social contexts, processing of meaning in communication, and pragmatic skills. In addition to difficulties in sound production and syntactic structure, children with CP often face obstacles in understanding the nuances of language, such as the use of nonliteral language, idiomatic expressions, and meanings that depend on a particular social context. Their social interactions can also be hampered by limitations in reading nonverbal cues, such as the facial expressions and intonation of the interlocutor, which are important in effective communication (Sufa et al., 2023). Therefore, further studies from a psycholinguistic perspective are needed to explore in more depth how the brains of children with CP process language, how neurological and cognitive factors affect their language acquisition, and how the social environment plays a role in supporting or hindering their communication development. More in-depth research can help identify the compensatory mechanisms that children with CP may use to understand and produce language, as well as develop more effective and evidence-based intervention strategies. An approach that combines speech therapy, assistive communication technology, and social interaction-based stimulation is expected to help children with CP achieve their optimal communication potential. By better understanding how language acquisition occurs in children with CP, researchers, practitioners, and families can work together to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for their language and communication development.

Thus, this study aims to understand the challenges of language acquisition in children with Cerebral Palsy (CP) from a psycholinguistic perspective and provide more comprehensive insights into their language acquisition mechanisms. This study not only focuses on the obstacles they face in the aspects of phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics, but also highlights the neurological, cognitive, and social factors that affect their language development. With a deeper understanding of how children with CP process and use language, this study is expected to contribute to designing more effective intervention strategies that are evidence-based and tailored to individual needs. Approaches that include speech therapy, the use of assistive communication technologies such as alternative and augmentative communication (AAC), and environmental stimulation that supports social interaction can help optimize their communication abilities. In addition, the results of this study are expected to provide a basis for professionals in linguistics, psychology, education, and therapy to develop more inclusive and adaptive methods of supporting children with CP. With better communication, children with CP can not only express themselves more effectively, but also improve their social interaction, confidence, and overall quality of life

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to deeply understand the challenges of language acquisition in children with CP from a psycholinguistic perspective. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with parents, speech therapists, and special educators who have experience in dealing with children with CP. In addition, direct observation of children with CP was also carried out to identify patterns of language acquisition and obstacles faced in everyday communication. The research instruments used included semi-structured interview guidelines, observation notes, and documentation in the form of recordings of children's

interactions with their environment. The data obtained was analyzed using a thematic analysis method to identify the main patterns that emerged related to the language acquisition of children with CP.

The validity of the data is maintained through source triangulation, which is done by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure consistency of findings. In addition, validation is carried out by requesting feedback from research participants to ensure that the resulting interpretations are in line with their experiences. This research is expected to provide deeper insights into the factors that influence the language acquisition of children with CP and intervention strategies that can help improve their communication skills. The findings of this research are expected to be a reference for educators, speech therapists, and parents in optimally supporting the language development of children with CP.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Language acquisition in children with Cerebral Palsy (CP) is a complex and challenging process because it involves interacting neurological, motor, cognitive, and social limitations (Rini, 2024). From a psycholinguistic perspective, various aspects of language acquisition, such as phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics, experience obstacles that vary depending on the severity of CP and surrounding supporting factors. Phonologically, many children with CP have difficulty in sound production due to impaired motor control of the articulatory muscles. This causes their speech to often be unclear or difficult for others to understand. In addition, oral-motor coordination disorders can also affect fluency of speech, intonation, and rhythm, which are important elements in verbal communication.

In morphological and syntactic aspects, children with CP tend to experience delays in understanding and forming complex sentence structures. Difficulties in cognitive processing can hinder their ability to construct grammatically correct phrases and sentences, making them more likely to use simple sentences or even single words when communicating (Neherta & Mulyasari, 2020). These obstacles become even more apparent when there are additional impairments, such as cognitive or hearing limitations, which slow down the process of language comprehension and production.

In pragmatic terms, children with CP often have difficulty using language effectively in social contexts. Challenges in reading facial expressions, understanding nonverbal cues, and difficulty maintaining conversations can hinder their social interactions (Kusuma & Pustaka, 2025). This is exacerbated by the limited opportunities for them to participate in daily communication due to physical and social barriers, which can ultimately impact their emotional development and self-confidence.

However, research shows that appropriate interventions can help overcome language acquisition barriers in children with CP. Speech therapy is one of the main approaches aimed at improving their phonological and articulation skills. In addition, the use of assistive communication technologies, such as alternative and augmentative communication (AAC), has been proven effective in helping children with CP to express themselves more clearly and independently. A supportive environment, from family, educators, and therapists, also plays an important role in creating opportunities for children with CP to engage in richer verbal and social interactions.

By understanding the challenges of language acquisition from a psycholinguistic perspective, it is hoped that more effective and evidence-based intervention strategies can be developed to improve the communication skills of children with CP. With better communication, children with CP can have a greater opportunity to interact, participate in social life, and improve their overall quality of life.

Motor Impediments in Language Acquisition

Children with Cerebral Palsy (CP) often face major challenges in controlling the muscle movements that play a role in sound production, which results in difficulties in articulation, intonation, and fluency of speech (Liza et al., 2024). This disorder occurs due to damage to the central nervous system that affects the coordination of the facial, tongue, and jaw muscles, all of which play an important role in voice formation. As a result, many children with CP experience dysarthria, a speech disorder characterized by weakness of the articulatory muscles, which makes their speech unclear and difficult to understand. In some cases, they are only able to pronounce certain words very limitedly, requiring communication aids, such as communication boards, voice-based applications, or augmentative and alternative technology (AAC) to help them express themselves.

In addition, impaired motor coordination also causes difficulty in controlling breathing when speaking. This limitation affects their ability to regulate the air pressure needed to produce clear and stable sound (Saleh et al., 2024). This imbalance has an impact on prosody or voice intonation patterns, so that their speech often sounds monotonous, intermittent, or has inappropriate pressure, making communication more difficult for the interlocutor to understand. In social interaction, this is a challenge in itself because proper intonation is essential to convey emotional meaning and nuances of conversation, such as the difference between statements and questions or expressions of emotions such as joy and disappointment.

The motor impairments experienced by children with CP also cause fatigue when speaking because the muscles used to speak work harder than children without CP. The extra effort they need to speak can cause fatigue, especially in long-term verbal communication. This results in children with CP often experiencing a decrease in the quality of communication after speaking for a certain period of time and tend to choose to communicate with alternative methods that are more efficient and less tiring. Therefore, interventions such as speech therapy, breathing training, and the use of communication aids are very important to help children with CP communicate more effectively and comfortably in everyday life (Muhtar & Lengkana (2019).

Cognitive Barriers in Language Acquisition

In addition to motor impairments, some children with CP experience limitations in cognitive aspects that affect their understanding of language structure. For example, they have difficulty understanding compound sentences or abstract concepts. This causes them to tend to use simple sentences when communicating. These difficulties are caused by limitations in the executive function of the brain that plays a role in language processing (Harefa et al., 2024).

However, not all children with CP have intellectual limitations. Some children with normal intelligence levels still experience difficulties in processing language information, especially in understanding social context and using language flexibly. This shows that language impairment in children with CP is not only caused by intellectual factors, but also by limitations in broader cognitive processing mechanisms.

These cognitive barriers also have an impact on pragmatic skills, which are a child's ability to use language according to the social context. Many children with CP have difficulty understanding nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions and tone of voice, which are an important part of interpersonal communication. Therefore, they need additional guidance to develop these skills.

The Role of Environment in Language Acquisition

Environmental factors have a very significant influence on the language development of children with Cerebral Palsy (CP). Children who get rich language stimulation and active social interaction from their family and environment tend to experience better language

development than those who lack adequate communication opportunities. (Halidu, 2022). Ongoing verbal interaction, such as talking directly to children, reading stories, and providing positive responses to their communication efforts, can help strengthen language skills and increase their confidence in communicating. In addition, a supportive environment also includes access to speech therapy and regular communication practice, which has been proven effective in improving the ability to speak and understand language in children with CP.

Support from parents and educators plays an important role in the language acquisition process. Children with CP often face various obstacles in verbal communication, so they need communication methods that suit their needs. The use of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC), such as communication boards, voice-based devices, or interactive digital applications, can help them express their thoughts, desires, and feelings more effectively. In addition, an inclusive school environment supported by educators who understand the needs of children with CP also plays a role in improving their language skills. Teaching strategies based on visual communication, gestures, or multisensory approaches can enrich their learning experience and help them understand and use language in various contexts of everyday life (Astuti, 2022).

Children who grow up in an environment rich in communication and language stimulation tend to experience better development than those who lack linguistic interaction. Active social interaction with peers is also an important factor in expanding the pragmatic skills of children with CP, especially in understanding facial expressions, tone of voice, and the rules of conversation in interpersonal communication (Arianti et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important for parents, educators, and therapists to create a supportive and interactive environment to provide language stimulation that suits the child's needs. With a holistic approach and strong environmental support, children with CP have a greater opportunity to develop optimal communication skills and increase their participation in social life.

The Use of Technology in Improving Communication Skills

Technological advances have had a very positive impact on improving the communication skills of children with Cerebral Palsy (CP). Many children with CP face major challenges in speaking due to motor impairments in the muscles involved in sound production. Therefore, the use of voice-based communication technology, artificial intelligence (AI) based applications, and electronic communication aids are very beneficial solutions for them. With the help of this technology, children who have difficulty speaking can express their wants, needs, and opinions more easily and effectively than conventional verbal communication. In addition to improving communication skills, this technology also helps children with CP become more independent in interacting with others, whether in the family environment, school, or in wider social life (Vandela & Sugiarto, 2021).

One of the tools that is widely used is a communication board with symbols or pictures, which contains a collection of symbols or words that represent certain concepts. Children can point to the appropriate symbol to convey their message to the other person. Some communication boards are even equipped with a voice system that will pronounce the word or sentence chosen by the child, so that the interaction is more fluent (Caropeboka, 2017). This method is very helpful for children with CP who have difficulty speaking but can still use hand or eye movements to communicate. In addition, artificial intelligence (AI)-based technology is increasingly used in communication applications, enabling text-to-speech conversion and helping children with CP compose sentences faster through word prediction and language personalization features. These applications can be used on devices such as tablets or smartphones, providing flexibility in communicating in various situations.

Another technology that also plays an important role is augmentative and alternative

communication (AAC) devices, which include various communication aids to replace or supplement verbal communication (Ediati & Diponegoro, 2020). Some of these devices are tablets with special software that allow children to choose words or images to form sentences which are then converted into sound. In addition, there are voice-based communication tools that are activated by touch or eye movements for children with more severe motor limitations. This technology provides children with CP the opportunity to communicate more naturally and efficiently, so that they can engage in everyday conversations without significant barriers.

As innovations in communication technology develop, new tools continue to be developed to support children with CP. Technologies such as brain sensors, AI-based speech recognition that can adapt to unclear speech patterns, and eye tracking systems allow children with limited mobility to select words or symbols by simply directing their gaze. With the advancement of this technology, it is hoped that children with CP can gain wider access to communication tools that suit their needs, so that they can participate more actively in social, educational, and family life. Support from parents, educators, and therapists in the use of this technology is also very important so that children can optimize its benefits and develop better communication skills.

Multidisciplinary Approach in Language Acquisition for Children with Cerebral Palsy

A multidisciplinary approach is essential in supporting the language acquisition of children with Cerebral Palsy (CP), given the complexity of the challenges they face in communicating. The motor, cognitive, and social impairments that accompany CP require the involvement of various experts in designing effective communication strategies that are tailored to the needs of each child. Collaboration between speech therapists, speech pathologists, medical rehabilitation doctors, psychologists, and educators is essential in developing interventions that can help children with CP improve their communication skills. By working together, these professionals can evaluate the child's language abilities, identify the specific barriers faced, and design a holistic and sustainable intervention program (Wahidah & Latipah, 2021).

One of the main approaches in language acquisition for children with CP is speech therapy, which focuses on developing articulation, prosody, and fluency skills (Indah, 2017). Speech therapists help children train the muscles involved in sound production, improve breathing control when speaking, and improve the sentence structure and vocabulary they use in everyday communication. In addition, speech therapy also includes training in understanding nonverbal cues and the use of facial expressions so that children can communicate more effectively in social interactions.

In addition to speech therapy, early language stimulation is a very important approach in helping children with CP develop their communication skills from an early age. Intensive linguistic interaction from infancy or toddlerhood can help children become accustomed to effective communication patterns and enrich their vocabulary. Parents and caregivers play a big role in this process by talking to children often, reading books, singing songs, and involving them in everyday conversations. Consistent language stimulation helps children with CP understand language structure and improve their receptive and expressive skills (Lubis et al., 2025).

In the digital age, the use of assistive technology has also been proven to help children with CP communicate. Voice-based communication aids, artificial intelligence (AI) applications, and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices are effective solutions for children who have difficulty speaking. This technology allows them to express their needs, feelings, and thoughts more easily. With devices such as tablets with communication software, interactive symbol boards, and eye tracking systems for selecting words or images, children with CP have more options for communication, which in turn can

increase their participation in social and educational environments (Mukti & Sudarmiani 2024).

An equally important approach is a holistic one, involving the child's family, teachers, and social environment in the process of language acquisition. Children with CP need continuous support from their environment so that they can develop better communication skills (Rantina & Hasmalena 2023). Parents, siblings, and teachers should be educated on the best ways to communicate with children, such as speaking clearly, giving children enough time to respond, and using body language and facial expressions to clarify meaning. In addition, an inclusive school environment can also help children with CP practice communicating with their peers and increase their confidence in using language in various situations.

By implementing a multidisciplinary approach that includes speech therapy, early language stimulation, utilization of assistive technology, and strong environmental support, children with CP have a greater opportunity to develop optimal communication skills. Collaboration between various parties is essential to ensure that each child receives interventions tailored to their needs, so that they can communicate more effectively and have a better quality of life

CONCLUSION

Students' difficulties in developing listening skills in English are influenced by various factors, such as a lack of exposure to native speech and limited vocabulary. Additionally, the diversity of accents often confuses students in understanding the meaning of conversations. Another contributing factor is the low motivation to learn due to teaching methods that are less interactive and unengaging. Most students also struggle to distinguish words spoken rapidly in natural conversation contexts. The lack of listening practice through authentic media, such as podcasts or English-language films, further worsens their ability to comprehend spoken discourse. Moreover, an uncondusive learning environment, such as a noisy classroom or unclear audio devices, can hinder students' understanding. Some students also experience anxiety while listening, especially when they need to grasp information instantly without the opportunity to replay it. A curriculum that focuses more on grammar than communication skills also becomes an obstacle to developing listening proficiency. To address this issue, a more interactive and practice-based learning approach is needed, such as listening to real-life conversations and engaging in communication simulations. Thus, students can gradually become more accustomed to understanding English in various situations and improve their listening skills effectively..

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