

## LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD INSPIRED BY HALLIDAY'S APPROACH: A PSYCHOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES

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### ABSTRACT

*Psycholinguistics examines the cognitive and neurological mechanisms underlying language acquisition, comprehension, and production. In early childhood, these processes are influenced by cultural and pedagogical contexts. Halliday's approach provides a rich environment where linguistic growth is inseparable from creativity and social interaction. This study employed a qualitative, phenomenological design, observing children in halliday's-inspired classrooms. Data were collected through storytelling, role-play, and multimodal communication, supported by introspection and thematic analysis. The results show that children's language acquisition is shaped by situation (observable behaviors), culture (norms of respect and reciprocity), and ideology (beliefs about agency and identity). Role-play and storytelling enhanced vocabulary and narrative competence, while multimodal communication supported meaning-making and identity formation. Language acquisition is not linear but relational and embodied. Psycholinguistic theory explains the mechanisms of comprehension and production. This manuscript brings positive impact for Psycholinguistics and teaching researches which can be used as references for the following teaching and psycholinguistics researches.*

**Key words :** *Psycholinguistics, context, children, Multimodal, environment*

### INTRODUCTION

Psycholinguistics, often referred to as the psychology of language, explores the relationship between linguistic structures and psychological processes. It is an interdisciplinary field shaped by contributions from linguistics, which examines the origins and functions of language, and psychology, which studies human behavior and cognition. Within this framework, language acquisition is understood as a process that involves

both comprehension and use (Wahyuningsih, 2018). (Aivazova, 2015) defines psycholinguistics as the study of the psychological and neurological mechanisms that enable humans to acquire, understand, and produce language. Building on this, Chomsky's theories situate language development within biological and psychological contexts, forming the basis of what are commonly referred to as "psycholinguistic" approaches.

Language acquisition in early childhood is a dynamic process shaped by cognitive development, social interaction, and cultural context, as emphasized (Suardana, 2021). The study of first language development through a psycholinguistic lens provides insight into how children perceive, process, and produce language during their formative years. Within this framework, the Halliday's inspired classroom offers a distinctive pedagogical environment that emphasizes agency, exploration, and dialogue, positioning children as active constructors of meaning rather than passive recipients of knowledge (Usmanovna et al., 2025).

The development of language in children start from early year of age. The development of language can be seen from verbal and non-verbal languages aspects. However, non-verbal language can be seen clearly such as smell. Halliday (2004) emphasizes that baby who is born in two and half hours could can smell the mother through sweat and the smell of breast milk. The language apparatus in children under a year has not developed completely so verbal language communication is very limited (Sianturi & Tampubolon, 2025). To improve the language acquisition from

child age, children language development must be supported with social environment (Izzah et al., 2025).

To develop child language very well, good environment is required very much since children learn language in the environment where they develop. Language adopted and kept in the brain will create child character since the language obtained from the environment cannot be selected, but it can be kept in brain permanently (Ahmad, 2021). It means that environment can create children social behaviour (Nurhikmah et al., 2022).

Previous research done by Batu (2024) observed child language development. The result of the research reveals that environment has important role to develop child language. Environmental aspect such as: family, media, visual, teacher, and others can support children to use language which can be realised with language clause structure. In child first language acquisition, children start learning about multimodality such as: gesture, sign, and speech (Karadöller et al., 2025). The children learn how the environment uses language expression in certain situation. In that process, children will be

familiar to identify kinds of language expression (Ningsih & Daulay, 2023).

Another research was performed by Meliana (2024) which the result of the research indicates that syntax in language can be used as measurement for child language development. The competence of applying language syntax requires more practice which must be supported with conducive environment (Suardana & Semadi, 2026).

This study examines the relationship between children's language development and their environment through Halliday's perspective, emphasizing the importance of social context, multimodality, and everyday interactions in supporting first language acquisition. By applying Halliday's framework, it highlights how environmental factors; such as family, teachers, media, and cultural practices. It shape the ways children acquire and use language, while also showing that language embedded in the environment contributes to their cognitive growth, social behavior, and character formation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Psycholinguistics, often referred to as the psychology of language, investigates the cognitive and

neurological mechanisms that enable humans to acquire, comprehend, and produce language (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). It is an interdisciplinary field shaped by linguistics, which examines the origins and functions of language, and psychology, which studies human behaviour and cognition (Sari et al., 2024). Chomsky's theories situate language development within biological and psychological contexts, forming the basis of psycholinguistic approaches that highlight the innate structures of the human mind in relation to language.

Language acquisition in early childhood is a dynamic process influenced by cognitive growth, social interaction, and cultural context (Madriana & Suardana, 2025). From a psycholinguistic perspective, children's ability to perceive, process, and produce language during formative years is inseparable from their environment and daily dialogical encounters. This view underscores that language is not passively absorbed but actively constructed through interaction, creativity, and identity formation.

Halliday's concept for language development is that language can not be apart from social context (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). Social context is realised

with three kinds of context, namely: context of situation, context of culture, and ideology (Halliday, 2004).

Context of situation is related to field where children develop. Children learn everything in the place where they develop. The cognition of children language is defined with the environment in which children adopt language. Context of culture is associated how children are trained to acquire language. It is related to steps how to adopt language permanently. Ideology is associated with what lexicon should be used in social interaction. It is related to norms applied in the environment where the language is used.(Pitana, 2025)

## **METHOD**

This research is psycholinguistic in nature, focusing on how language is acquired, processed, and produced by children within the cultural and pedagogical context of Halliday's approach. The reference of the text is aligned with the classroom situations and interactions occurring in early childhood education settings. Children's multimodal expressions, such as spoken words, gestures, role-play, and storytelling, are treated as linguistic data

that can be analysed from a psycholinguistic perspective. As mentioned previously, this study examines how language development is realized through Halliday practices, positioning the research within the field of psycholinguistics.

This research employed a qualitative design (Firmani et al., 2022), specifically a phenomenological approach, to capture the lived experiences of children in classrooms. The researcher observed children's participation in role-playing, storytelling, and multimodal communication activities during the academic year 2025–2026. These activities were chosen because they represent authentic contexts where language acquisition occurs dynamically.

The data collection involved classroom observations, documentation of children's verbal and nonverbal language, and reflective notes on teacher and child interactions. Examples of observed behaviours including children's vocabulary use, narrative competence, gesture-based communication, and collaborative dialogue. These behaviours were

analysed as evidence of psycholinguistic processes in action.

The theoretical foundation of this research is psycholinguistics, supported by Chomsky's biological and psychological perspectives on language acquisition which emphasizes the role of social interaction. The data analysis was conducted through thematic interpretation, focusing on how children's linguistic behaviours reflect psycholinguistic processes of comprehension and production. Extralinguistic factors such as classroom culture, teacher mediation, and peer collaboration were also considered, since language development is inseparable from social and cultural context.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Context of Situation**

Context of situation is related to the physical and observable point of view. In this study, the context of situation is viewed as denotative references, focusing on how children in Halliday's-inspired classrooms use language in daily activities. The psycholinguistic perspective highlights how comprehension and production of language are shaped by interaction and environment.

### **a. Storytelling**

Storytelling allowed children to expand vocabulary and narrative competence. Some children felt challenged when recalling words, but the activity encouraged them to experiment with language (Gunawan et al., 2025).

During a storytelling session where the teacher read *The Three Little Pigs*, children demonstrated both comprehension and creative processing. Several children anticipated the repeated phrase "I'll huff and I'll puff," joining in chorally, which showed memory recall and phonological awareness. One child, when retelling, substituted "wolf" with "monster," reflecting lexical experimentation and personal interpretation.

Another child invented a new ending, suggesting that the third pig invited the wolf to be his friend instead of chasing him away. This variation illustrated imaginative expansion and narrative competence, as the child processed the original text

and produced a creative alternative. Peer responses included laughter and further suggestions, such as the pigs building a “castle” instead of a brick house, showing collaborative dialogue and co-construction of meaning.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, these observations highlight how storytelling supports vocabulary growth, sequencing, pragmatic awareness, and creativity.

#### **b. Role-play**

Role-play created opportunities for children to use language creatively. While some children hesitated to speak, peer collaboration motivated them to express themselves (Rahmadani & Suardana, 2025) .

In a “family play” scenario, a 2-year-old picked up a doll and said, “Baby sleep,” while rocking it gently. This short utterance reflected early vocabulary use and symbolic representation, showing how children begin to connect words with actions.

A 3-year-old extended the play by pretending to cook, stirring an empty bowl and saying, “Soup ready.” The child then offered the “food” to peers, demonstrating imaginative expansion and the ability to use language pragmatically in social interaction.

In another observation, two children enacted a “doctor and patient” role-play. The “doctor” tapped a peer’s arm with a toy stethoscope and said, “Check,” while the “patient” responded with “Ouch.” This exchange illustrated turn-taking, imitation, and emergent dialogue, even with limited vocabulary.

These observation show that role-play at ages 2–3 provides opportunities for children to experiment with language creatively, integrate symbolic actions with speech, and negotiate meaning with peers.

#### **c. Gesture and movement**

It supported comprehension. Children often used hand gestures or facial expressions to reinforce

meaning, showing the integration of verbal and nonverbal language (Shutova et al., 2023).

For example, during storytelling, some children pointed at illustrations while repeating words, others widened their eyes to emphasize surprise, and a few nodded or shook their heads to signal agreement or refusal. These observable behaviours demonstrated how gestures and movements worked alongside spoken language to strengthen understanding in the immediate classroom context.

#### **d. Collaborative dialogue**

It sometimes caused difficulties in turn-taking, but it also strengthened listening skills and pragmatic awareness (Sudar et al., 2025).

In classroom observations, children often spoke simultaneously or hesitated to respond, yet these moments became opportunities to practice waiting, listening, and adjusting their speech. The observable exchanges highlighted how dialogue functioned as both a challenge

and a scaffold for developing communicative competence in the immediate learning environment.

During block play, two children tried to decide who would place the next piece. Both spoke at the same time, saying “Me!” and “I do!” before pausing. One child then waited and responded, “Okay, you first,” showing how turn-taking was negotiated.

#### **e. Art and symbolic play**

It provided alternative channels of communication, helping children who were less confident in spoken language to still participate meaningfully (Firmani et al., 2022).

In classroom observations, children expressed ideas through drawing, painting, and block-building, often combining these creations with gestures or simple words. For example, one child drew a house and pointed to it while saying “home,” while another arranged blocks into a tower and declared “big.” Pretend play also allowed children to enact scenarios; such

as cooking or caring for a doll, where symbolic actions carried meaning even when verbal language was limited.

## **2. Context of Culture**

Context of culture is related to norms and values embedded within the classroom environment. It is associated with connotative references, beyond the immediate linguistic acts. From a psycholinguistic perspective, language acquisition is inseparable from cultural participation and social practices.

### **a. Storytelling**

Storytelling can be interpreted as a cultural practice of sharing experiences. It reflects the value of narrative in shaping identity and community

When the teacher read *The Three Little Pigs*, children's responses reflected not only linguistic development but also cultural values embedded in the narrative. The repeated phrase "I'll huff and I'll puff" became a shared classroom chant, showing how collective participation in storytelling fosters a sense of community and cultural belonging.

Children's imaginative variations, such as suggesting the wolf become a "friend" or the pigs build a "castle" illustrated how they negotiated cultural meanings of cooperation, safety, and creativity. These reinterpretations revealed that storytelling is not simply about language acquisition, but about transmitting and reshaping cultural narratives.

From a cultural perspective, the story provided a framework for children to explore themes of family, resilience, and social roles. The pigs' houses symbolized protection and resourcefulness, values that children connected to their own lived experiences. By retelling and modifying the story, children demonstrated agency in engaging with cultural traditions while simultaneously constructing new meanings.

### **b. Role-play**

Role-play symbolizes children's ability to take perspectives, aligning with Vygotsky's idea that social interaction mediates language growth.

When children engaged in "doctor and patient" role-play, their actions

reflected cultural values of care and responsibility. The child who played the doctor asked, “Check,” while gently tapping a peer’s arm, and the “patient” responded with “Ouch.” Beyond the observable utterances, this scenario revealed how children were beginning to internalize social roles and cultural practices of caregiving.

In a “family play” activity, children assigned roles such as “mama,” “baby,” and “cook.” These role choices mirrored familiar cultural structures of family life, showing how children use play to explore and reproduce social identities and everyday routines. The act of pretending to cook and serve food reflected cultural values of nurturing and communal sharing.

Similarly, in a “shopkeeper and customer” role-play, children negotiated buying and selling, echoing cultural practices of exchange and cooperation. When peers prompted one another with “Say money,” it demonstrated how peer collaboration reinforces cultural scripts of commerce and social interaction.

From a cultural perspective, these role-play activities show that children are not only practicing language but also participating in cultural narratives of care, family, and community life. Role-play thus becomes a medium through which children acquire language while simultaneously learning the cultural meanings embedded in everyday social practices

#### **c. Gestures and multimodal expression**

It represent the diverse language of childhood, showing that communication is not limited to spoken words but includes symbolic systems valued in Semiotic (Suardana, 2023)

In classroom observations, children widened their eyes to show surprise, pointed to images to emphasize recognition, or rocked dolls to enact care. These embodied expressions connected them to cultural scripts of storytelling, nurturing, and collective participation.

Multimodal communication combining gesture, movement, art, and symbolic play: demonstrated how children learn and enact cultural values of cooperation, creativity, and care, showing that

language development is inseparable from the cultural traditions of expression and interaction..

**d. Collaborative dialogue**

It reflects cultural norms of respect, reciprocity, and listening. It emphasizes that language is not only a tool for communication but also a medium for building relationships (Ohoiwutun et al., 2025).

In classroom observations, children's overlapping speech, interruptions, and negotiated pauses showed how they were practicing cultural scripts of sharing ideas and building meaning together. Even when turn-taking was imperfect, the exchanges embodied traditions of community participation, where listening, responding, and co-constructing dialogue are valued as part of collective growth

**3. Ideology**

Ideology is associated with the deeper meaning of language use, reflecting beliefs about children, learning, and communication. Within the psycholinguistic framework, ideology emerges in how language is understood as both cognitive and social (Sukarno & Muhaimin, 2024).

**a. Children as active constructors of meaning**

Halliday's ideology positions children not as passive recipients but as protagonists in the process of language development. This aligns with psycholinguistic theories that emphasize active processing in language acquisition (Meliana, 2024).

In classroom observations, children demonstrated their role as active constructors of meaning when they reshaped familiar narratives and infused them with their own interpretations. For example, during a storytelling session, one child interrupted the flow of the tale to add a new character, while another used exaggerated gestures to emphasize the wolf's actions.

These moments showed that children were not passive recipients of language but protagonists who actively processed, negotiated, and reconstructed meaning in ways that aligned with their lived experiences.

**b. Language as identity and agency**

The use of multiple symbolic forms reflects the belief that language is tied to self-expression and

empowerment (Phothongsunan, 2026).

In classroom observations, language emerged as a powerful tool of identity and agency when children used multiple symbolic forms to express themselves. A child who was hesitant to speak verbally drew a picture of their family and pointed to each figure, asserting belonging and identity through art. Another child enacted a “shopkeeper” role, combining words like “buy” and “money” with gestures of handing over objects, showing agency in shaping the interaction.

- c. Integration of theory and practice** (Sirait et al., 2025) shows that role-play and storytelling enhance vocabulary and narrative competence, confirming that psycholinguistic processes thrive in environments that value creativity and agency.

During a group storytelling activity, children collaboratively retold the tale of “The Three Little Pigs.” One child used the phrase “small house” while pointing to a drawing, while another added “big wolf” with dramatic hand gestures.

In role-play, children enacted a “market” scenario. The “shopkeeper” arranged blocks as fruits and declared “Apple, banana,” while the “customer” responded with “I buy” and handed over pretend money. This exchange integrated linguistic structures with symbolic play, demonstrating how theory and practice converge in everyday classroom life

- d. Respect for diversity in communication**

Halliday (2014) highlights that multimodal communication supports meaning-making. This ideology reinforces the view that language development is not linear but relational and cultural. In classroom observations, children expressed meaning through diverse communicative modes; spoken words, gestures, drawings, and symbolic play. For instance, one child who was hesitant to speak verbally used hand movements to act out a story, while another drew a picture to represent their idea. Similarly, during group play, some children relied on dialogue while others contributed through

actions such as building with blocks or role-playing silently. Each mode was respected and integrated into the collective activity, showing that multimodal communication supports inclusion and shared meaning-making.

The findings demonstrate that psycholinguistic processes, comprehension, production, and acquisition; are deeply embedded in the Halliday's inspired classroom context. Children's language growth is shaped by situation (observable behaviours), culture (norms and practices), and ideology (beliefs about agency and communication). This integration confirms that language is not merely acquired but lived through interaction, creativity, and cultural participation (Halliday, 2004).

## **CONCLUSION**

This research demonstrates that language acquisition in early childhood, when viewed through a psycholinguistic lens, is not a passive process but a dynamic interplay of cognition, social interaction, and cultural participation. The findings show that children's

linguistic growth is shaped by the context of situation (observable behaviours such as storytelling, role-play, gestures, and dialogue), the context of culture (norms and practices embedded in the classroom and community), and the ideology (beliefs about children's agency, identity, and communication).

Halliday's approach provides a pedagogical environment that embodies psycholinguistic principles. Its philosophy encourages multimodal communication, allowing children to express themselves through spoken language, art, movement, and symbolic play. This aligns with psycholinguistic theories that emphasize comprehension, production, and the neurological mechanisms of language development.

Halliday's concept is like role-play and storytelling enhance vocabulary and narrative competence. These findings reinforce the idea that psycholinguistic processes thrive in environments that value creativity, collaboration, and agency. In conclusion, the integration of psycholinguistic theory and Halliday's practice highlights that language exists, embodies, and support the context. Children do not only acquire language through cognitive mechanisms but it is

also through meaningful social interactions and cultural participation. This study underscores the importance of creating educational contexts that honour children's voices, foster multimodal expression, and support linguistic growth as part of their holistic development.

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