Anat Ninio

Anat Ninio (Hebrew: ענת ניניו; born August 10, 1944) is a professor emeritus of psychology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. She specializes in the interactive context of language acquisition, the communicative functions of speech, pragmatic development, and syntactic development. Ninio is best known for her work on joint picture-book reading of parents and young children;[1] for developing the widely used Ninio and Wheeler[2] and INCA-A[3] taxonomies of communicative acts; and for her work on syntactic development, combining learning theory with the Chomskyan Minimalist Program.[4] She has published three books,[4][5][6] and over a hundred peer-referenced papers, book chapters and conference presentations.[7]

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Biography

Ninio received a B.A. with majors in Statistics and English Linguistics from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 1965, and an additional B.A. in Psychology in 1969, from the same university. As a graduate student, she studied cognitive psychology with Daniel Kahneman the future Nobel laureate,[8] receiving an M.A. in 1970 and a Ph.D. in 1974, all from the Hebrew University.[7] She spent a post-doctoral year at the University of Oxford in 1975/76 with Jerome Bruner, specializing in the social interactionist theory of language acquisition.

Ninio was appointed a lecturer in Psychology at the Hebrew University in 1976,[9] was promoted to senior lecturer in 1982, to associate professor in 1989, and to full professor in 1994. She holds the endowed chair of Joseph H. and Belle R. Braun Professor in Psychology at Hebrew University. She served in various administrative capacities at the Hebrew University, among them as the Chair of the Graduate Developmental Program, Chair of the Department of Psychology,[10] Chair of the Sturman Human Development Center, and Director of the Martin and Vivian Levin Center for the Normal and Psychopathological Development of the Child and Adolescent. She also served as a visiting professor at Duke University, New York University, the New School for Social Research, New York, the University of Quebec at Montreal, Harvard University, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and at the University of Pennsylvania. She is a member of the Executive Committee of the International Association for the Study of Child Language (IASCL).

Ninio also published 2 Hebrew language poetry books, one under the pseudonym 'Ada Shimon.[11][12]

Joint picture-book reading of parents and young children

With Jerome Bruner and others, Ninio identified joint picture-book reading of parents and young children as an important early context for the acquisition of vocabulary and literacy skills, and described the processes of parental "scaffolding" that facilitate learning in this context.[1][13][14][15][16] Reading with children is considered nowadays crucial for success in school[17] and it is

promoted by the U.S. Department of Education as "one of the most important things that parents can do to help their children become readers".[18]

Taxonomies of communicative acts

With a postdoctoral student, Polly Wheeler, Ninio developed a three-layer taxonomy and coding system of verbal-communicative acts in mother-infant interaction, distinguishing speech acts, talk interchanges, and discourse functions.[2] The taxonomy was built on the theoretical writings of Speech Act theorists such as John Searle and sociologists such as Erving Goffman, as well as on mothers' descriptions of videotaped interaction sessions in which they had participated.[19] An abridged version of it (Inventory of Communicative Acts-Abridged, INCA-A),[3] was prepared by Ninio for use by Catherine Snow, Barbara Pan, and colleagues at Harvard University in the research project "Foundations for Language Assessment in Spontaneous Speech" funded by the National Institutes of Health. The abridged version has been adopted as the official communicative coding system of the Child Language Data Exchange System (CHILDES) project.[20] INCA-A has the same speech act codes but a less detailed repertoire of talk interchange codes than the full Ninio and Wheeler version. Both versions of the Ninio and Wheeler system are widely used in projects on English as well as Hebrew, Dutch, German, Irish, Italian, Spanish, Catalan, Romanian, Turkish, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin Chinese, and others. They are also used in research involving young adults, second language learners, peer conversations, children in the Head Start program, aphasics, autistic children, visually impaired children, and more.

Syntactic development

Unexpectedly for an empiricist who emphasizes learning and the interactive context of acquisition, Ninio uses as her linguistic framework Chomsky's Minimalist Program alongside the formally analogous Dependency Grammar. The appeal to the binary combining operation Merge (or Dependency) and the use of grammatical relations as atomic units of analysis makes her work on syntactic development unusual in the field where many researchers prefer such holistic approaches as Construction Grammar, or else forsake linguistically oriented analyses in favor of statistical patterns to be found by automatic means. In her empirical work, Ninio employs the methods of corpus-based linguistics in order to characterize child-directed speech and young children's early multiword productions. In her study of the acquisition of the core grammatical relations of English, her research team constructed a 1.5 million words strong parental corpus and a 200,000 words strong child corpus, parsing them manually for the relevant syntactic relations.[6]

In describing the development of language in children, Ninio adopts the concepts and methods of Complexity Science describing the process of acquisition as one in which young children join a complex network of speakers and speech as new participants in the network. In this theoretical model, children are likened to new users of the World-Wide Web who both use the WWW and also create it with their own productions[4] The pragmatic uses of speech for communication among speakers are thus viewed not only as the background and context of acquisition but also as building blocks of connectivity in the complex system which is language.

Footnotes

1. Ninio, A. and Bruner, J. (1978). The achievement and antecedents of labelling. Journal of Child Language, 5, 1-15. Reprinted in M. B. Franklin and S. S. Barton (eds). (1988). Child language: a reader (pp. 36-49). Oxford: Oxford University Press. This article is the most cited paper published in the Journal of Child Language, the official journal of the International Association for the Study of Child Language (IASCL), according to the Web of Science and Google Scholar.
2. Ninio, A. and Wheeler, P. (1984). A manual for classifying verbal communicative acts in mother-infant interaction. Working Papers in Developmental Psychology, No. 1. Jerusalem: The Martin and Vivian Levin Center, Hebrew University. Reprinted as Transcript Analysis, 1986, 3, 1-82, [revised version (1987) http://micro5.mscc.huji.ac.il/~msninio/CDBK-wd.doc].

3. Ninio, A., Wheeler, P., Snow, C. E., Pan, B. A., and Rollins, P. R. (1991). INCA-A: Inventory of Communicative Acts - Abridged. Coding manual distributed by Harvard Graduate School of Education. See also a description of INCA-A in Ninio, A., Snow, C. E., Pan, B.A. and Rollins, P. R. (1994). Classifying communicative acts in children's interactions. Journal of Communication Disorders, 27, 157–187. (http://psyling.psy.cmu.edu/papers/years/1994/jcd/ninio.pdf) Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20120405075931/http://psyling.psy.cmu.edu/papers/years/1994/jcd/ninio.pdf) 2012-04-05 at the Wayback Machine

4. Ninio, A. (2006). Language and the learning curve: A new theory of syntactic development. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-929982-9, 978-0-19-929981-2 (http://ukcatalogue.oup.com/product/9780199299812.do)

5. Ninio, A. and Snow, E. C. (1996). Pragmatic development. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. ISBN 978-0-8133-2471-5

6. Ninio, A. (2011). Syntactic development, its input and output. Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-0-19-956596-2

7. Anat Ninio's Curriculum Vitae (http://micro5.mscc.huji.ac.il/~msninio/-CV-2017.doc) including her list of publications.

8. See for instance Ninio, A. and Kahneman, D. (1974). Reaction time in focused and in divided attention. Journal of Experimental Psychology, 103, 393-399.

9. "Anat Ninio's faculty biography, Department of Psychology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem" (https://web.archive.org/web/20120426021148/http://psychology.huji.ac.il/en/?cmd=Faculty.113&page=2&act=read&id=14). Archived from the original (http://psychology.huji.ac.il/en/?cmd=Faculty.113&page=2&act=read&id=14) on 2012-04-26. Retrieved 2011-12-04.

10. "History of the Department of Psychology at Hebrew University including a list of the department's Chairs by year of appointment" (https://web.archive.org/web/20120225192357/http://psychology.huji.ac.il/en/?cmd=About.112). Archived from the original (http://psychology.huji.ac.il/en/?cmd=About.112) on 2012-02-25. Retrieved 2011-12-04.

11. Ninio, Anat (1989). *'Al sfat habrekha hamerutsefet [על שפת הבריכה המרוצפת]* (in Hebrew). Tel Aviv: 'Eked.

12. Shimon, Ada (1981). *Rega'im sefurim [רגעים ספורים]* (in Hebrew). Tel Aviv: M. Noyman.

13. Ninio, A. (1980). Picture-book reading in mother-infant dyads belonging to two subgroups in Israel. Child Development, 51, 587-590.

14. Ninio, A. (1980). The ostensive definition in vocabulary teaching. Journal of Child Language, 7, 565-573.

15. Ninio, A. (1983). Joint bookreading as a multiple vocabulary acquisition device. Developmental Psychology, 19, 445-451.

16. Snow, C., and Ninio, A. (1985). The contracts of literacy: Learning how to learn from reading books. Invited chapter. In W. Teale (Ed.), Emergent literacy: writing and reading (pp. 116-138). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

17. [What can parents do to help their children succeed in school? PISA in focus. OECD 2011/10 (November). "Archived copy" (https://www.oecd.org/pisa/49012097.pdf) (PDF). Retrieved 2019-09-22.]

18. [Helping Your Child Become a Reader, U.S. Department of Education, 2005. http://www2.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/reader/reader.pdf]

19. A detailed description of the sources for the taxonomy and of the various versions of it can be found in: Ninio, A. (1991, April).Introduction to the Ninio and Wheeler taxonomy of verbal communicative acts and to the INCA abridged version. (http://micro5.mscc.huji.ac.il/~msninio/INTRO-CODING.doc) Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Seattle, Washington, April, 1991.

20. MacWhinney, B. (2000). The CHILDES project: Tools for analyzing talk, Vol 1: Transcription format and programs (3rd ed.). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 99-102. See also the online manual. (http://childes.psy.cmu.edu/manuals/chat.pdf) Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20150710000747/http://childes.psy.cmu.edu/manuals/chat.pdf) 2015-07-10 at the Wayback Machine

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External links

- Anat Ninio's official website (http://micro5.mscc.huji.ac.il/~msninio/)
- Anat Ninio's faculty biography, Department of Psychology, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. (https://web.archive.org/web/20120426021148/http://psychology.huji.ac.il/en/?cmd=Faculty.113&page=2&act=read&id=14)
- Anat Ninio (https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=91C1oC4AAAAJ) publications indexed by Google Scholar
- Bibliography on cognitive and linguistic networks (http://www.lsi.upc.edu/~rferrericancho/linguistic_and_cognitive_networks.html)
- Bibliography of Dependency Grammar (http://www.lingviko.net/dgb.htm)
- Richard Hudson's 2000 Dependency Grammar (http://www.gabormelli.com/RKB/2000_DependencyGrammar)
- A bibliography on Word Grammar (https://web.archive.org/web/20120204034806/http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/dick/wg.htm)
- Books in the Israel National Library catalogue (http://aleph.nli.org.il/F/U4LMMX5Q46CTBFNLLFTCF8B8ISYLRXTIHTPQCHT9XDJETNG7G1-15634?func=find-acc&acc_sequence=019496381)