

Blame Shifting: A Unique Phase in Bengali Children's Meaning Acquisition Process

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Abstract

'Blame shifting' or 'deflection' is generally a psychological process where something is passed over to someone else in an attempt to draw attention away. It is a type of defense regarded as emotionally unmannerly. But in this paper, blame shifting has been presented as a positive aspect, representing a general phase that children go through during their first language acquisition period. When children acquire meaning, they shift blame, that starts as a psychological process but linguistically represents the creative use of language in different ways. In this paper, I tried to present the phase of blame shifting of ten participant children as a medium of meaning construction in their first language acquisition process. In an attempt to break the stereotypical assumption of the term 'blame', this paper would try to reflect how children shift blame on others as a part of their language development by manipulating language use and cognitive intelligence.

Key words: Blame shifting, Defense mechanism, Meaning acquisition, Child language development, Cognition, Poverty of Stimulus, Innateness

1. Introduction

"Men are only clever at shifting blame from their own shoulders to those of others."

- Titus Livius (59 BC–17 AD)

Titus Livius, a Roman historian, discussed blame shifting in the distant past, suggesting that even though people disapprove of it, this method of avoiding others' censure is nothing new.¹

Shifting blame is to hold someone else liable for anything, particularly something negative that has occurred. It can be presented as assigning someone or something responsible for any undesirable incident or phenomenon. When children blame other or external situations for their behaviour, blame shifting happens. It might arise when children do something wrong, fail to do something right, or feel a specific way, they become reluctant to admit their own part of responsibility. They shift their burden of blame or action on others.²

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¹ Lozano Elizabeth and Laurent Roger, 'The effect of admitting fault versus shifting blame on expectations for others to do the same', Vol. 14(3), (PloS one 2019), pp. 1-19, (10.1371/journal.pone.0213276)

² Hakan Cetinkaya and Ervin Ercin, 'The Psychological Problems Seen in the Children of Divorced Parents and the Nursing Approach Concerning These Problems', *Pediatric Nursing* (ed.), *Psychiatric and Surgical Issues*, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.5772/59166>

The present research tested how exposure to a blame-shifting or responsibility-taking agent leads the participant children to another unrelated target as semantic mapping or meaning making, particularly leaving the perceivers surprised by their reaction to the failure. Age group of the participant children was 3 to 5 years (+/- couple of months). The discussion focuses on how children manage to shift blame for their misdeeds with different sentences that explore their meaning-making ability along with developed cognition that leads to this level of language practices.

2. Cognitive Development

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, “Growth and development in all four areas of childhood are particularly rapid in the first five years of life”.³

Some of these are the development of one's physical abilities, their capacity for language and communication, their intellect, and their capacity for positive social and emotional interaction.

What we mean when we talk about a child's cognitive development is their capacity for abstract thought, curiosity, and problem solving. The brain is the most important part of this process. Cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget proposed that children go through a sequence of stages as their brains and environments interact. A child's cognitive development, he added, is reasoning, demonstrate that cognitive development and language acquisition are intrinsically linked not so much about acquiring knowledge as it is about developing or constructing a mental model of the world, and that this model is fluid as the child ages.⁴

Language comprehension becomes more mature and complex as children grow older. Their brains develop along with their ability to communicate, comprehend, and produce spoken language. When children learn a first language, they build on what they already know by using conceptual information to differentiate and categorize the objects, relationships, and events they encounter.⁵ All of these require properly formed brain development.

It is common to see children shift the blame to others and make accusations of wrongdoing when they are made to take responsibility for their actions. They always

³ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, *Brain Architecture*, 2019, Retrieved from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>

⁴ Sarah McLeod, ‘Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development’, 2009

⁵ Eve Vivian Clark, ‘How language acquisition builds on cognitive development’, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, Vol. 8(10), 2004, pp. 472-478.

see themselves as the victim in these kinds of situations. As a result, they prepare themselves mentally to avoid blame and shift their perspectives.⁶

When blame intensifies to hazardous shame, it is completely obvious that it needs to be monitored. However, since the participants in this study were all under the age of five, I found nothing concerning in their methods of accusing others or shifting blame. Rather, the language used to escape the rather unpleasant situation was very creative and demonstrated an advanced level of semantic development in majority of the participants.

3. Why Do Children Shift Blame?

Children engage in blame shifting when they attribute their negative actions to someone else or something other than themselves. Whether they broke a rule, or, did not follow them, or just felt a certain way, they are hesitant to take ownership of their actions and be held accountable for them. They blame others rather than themselves for failures in accountability and/or action.⁷

Blame-shifting or blame attribution is an irrational and context-switching behaviour. When someone confronts them about something they did or attempts to set limits, the primary focus shifts back, putting that person on the defensive.⁸

Children and sometimes the adults are also reluctant in part to admit their fiasco or shame because of the general desire to avoid negative social evaluation and disapproval from others.⁷ Thus, blame shifting is taken as a way of saving face when things go wrong.

Usually grown-ups sometimes shift blame away from themselves by bringing attention to external causes,⁹ attempting to obscure their role in causing misfortune or to hide failures that could likely be noticed by others and can cause repercussions.¹⁰

However, this study investigated the idea that children of this age shift blame to avoid being reprimanded or verbally abused by their caregivers. It exemplifies their pure

⁶ Ofer Zur, 'Rethinking 'Don't Blame the Victim: Psychology of Victimhood', *Journal of Couple Therapy*, Vol. 4(3/4), 1994, pp. 15-36.

⁷ Lozano Elizabeth. and Laurent Roger, 'The effect of admitting fault versus shifting blame on expectations for others to do the same', Vol. 14(3), (PloS one 2019), pp.1-19, (10.1371/journal.pone.0213276)

⁸ Mark Leary, 'Motivational and emotional aspects of the self', *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 58(1), 2007, pp. 317-344.

⁹ Jordan Peterson. and Justin Barrett, 'Explanatory style and academic performance among university freshmen', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1987, Vol. 53, pp. 603-607.

¹⁰ Kent Weaver, 'The politics of blame avoidance', *Journal of public policy*, Vol. 6(4), 1986, pp. 371-398.

motives of avoiding any upcoming hassles. I have also noticed that they have gotten better about taking responsibility for their actions after receiving advice from their elders. Children's tendency to blame others is absolutely natural as long as it does not become a habit or a pessimistic outlook. Through the lens of blame shifting, this study investigates the various semantic representations that young children exhibit as they learn to speak for the first time.

Data Exploration

This is an empirical research in which ten respondents were observed in their natural surroundings, as their age group was below five years. Data has been collected only on the basis of the participant children's language use. Although blame shifting has been studied psychologically in numerous studies, it has not been studied linguistically in relation to children learning their first language, particularly Bengali-speaking children.

From my observations, I learned that even toddlers occasionally employ idiomatic language to convey complex ideas about their wants, needs, and expectations. Because of this, they develop their own, novel ways of using language, such as those used for emotional manipulation or semantic negotiation, shifting blame, and coining new words.

The next few sections will describe data that explores children's language innovation, which can be presented as blame shifting, and will be accompanied by detailed analysis.

Data

I have assigned each participant a number rather than a name for reasons of confidentiality. The following are examples of the propensity of children to shift blame:

Child-1

Since this child was able to string together sentences, this toddler has begun placing blame on those around her. When child-1 makes a mistake, such as dropping a glass or wiping her wet hands on the curtain, she immediately points the finger at someone else.

One day I saw a torn doll in her living room and a skedher-
 ei putu.lta ke chireche
 this doll. DEF who tear.PERF.PRES.3P
 Who tore this doll?

She simply said, 'No' - by moving her head side to side without any second thought and blamed the household staff. Although her mother reports that Child-1 did it.

When she sleeps at night, saliva drops on her pillow. One morning, her mother said to her-

beibi dekho ki korecho eta
 baby.3rd.sg look.IMP. what do.PERF.PRES.2P this
 Baby look at what you have done?

The child replied-

egula ki ami kori nai
 this.PL. what I.1SG. do.PROG.PRES.1P NEG.
 What are these! I did not do it!

dekhe mone hocche keu pani
 look.PERF.PRES.1P seem be.PERF.PRES.1P. somebody water
 dheleche
 pour.PERF.PRES.3P
 It seems like somebody poured water on it.

Child-1 mostly blames on her elder sister and the household staff (who stay the whole day with her).

Like-

ami kokhon TV charlam
 I.1SG. when TV on.PERF.PRES.1P
 When did I turn on the TV!

oi eshe charlo
 she.3P.SG. come.PERF.PRES. on.PRES.PERF.3P
 She came and turned it on.

Few more examples are like,

ami jacchilam glas.ta nore pani pore gelo
 I.1SG. go.PAST.PROG.1P glass.DEF. move water drip go.PERF.PRES.
 I was going but(somehow) the glass moved and the water dripped.

neil polish ki ami felechi
 nail polish what I.1SG drop.PERF.PRES.1P
 Did I drop the nailpolish?

ami ki dei
 I.1SG. what give.PRES.1P
 Do I use nailpolish!

chotdir hate dekhechilam
 younger-sister hand.LOC. see.PERF.PAST.1P
 I saw it in younger sister's hand.

pepi tip dilo dim.ta bhenge gelo
 pepi press give.Past. 3P egg.DEF. break.PERF.PRES. go.PAST.3P
 Pepi pressed and the egg broke

almarir dorja choklet nije pore geche
 cupboard door chocolate self drop go.PERF.PRES.
 The chocolate fell from the cupboard door by itself

ami nite chai nai
 I.1SG take.PRES.1P want.PRES.1P NEG
 I did not want to take.

Child-2:

When I went to visit child-2, another participant boy at his house for the first time, I saw some pencil marks on the wall. I asked him-

egulo ke dag dilo
 this.PL. who mark.PL. give.PAST.3P
 Who put these marks?

ami ki jani
 I.1SG. what know.1SG
 Do I know?

He pointed at his elder sister sitting in the other room with uncertainty.

o koreche mone hocche
 she.3SG. do.PERF.PRES.3SG seem be.PRES.PROG.
 She did I think.

But his mother said he did that. Sometimes when he watches TV for a long time and mother scolds him, he says-

amar ki dosh!
 my.POSS.1P. what fault
 What is my fault!

baba bollo ekhane boshe dekho
 father say.PERF.PRES.3P here sit.PERF.PRES. watch.IMP.
 Father said to sit here and watch.

At that time his father was not even at home. When the new house helper came, child-2 started blaming her for everything.

Child-3:

She was standing on a stool and playing with her brother. Suddenly she fell off the stool-

bhaiya tomar jonno pore gelam
 brother your.POSS.3P for fall.PERF.PRES. go.PERF.PAST.1P
 Brother, I fell down for you.

ami ki korlam
 I.1SG. what do.PERF.PAST.1P
 What did I do?

fele dile
 drop give.PAST.2P
 You dropped me.

Mother asked her one day-
 amar iPad ta ke dhoreche
 my.POSS.1P Ipad.DEF who touch.PERF.PRES..3P
 Who touched my Ipad?

bhaiya dhoreche
 brother touch.PERF.PRES.3P
 Brother touched it.
 (Her brother was not at home at that time).

dogi koreche tahole
 dog do.PERF.PRES.3P may
 The dog might have done!

Again, once mother saw some dried rice on the iPad screen, she asked the child-
 iPad e egula ki
 iPad.LOC. this.PL. what
 What are these on the Ipad?

bhat ke lagiyeche
 rice who.3.SG put.PERF.PRES.3P
 Who put rice here?

mone hoy iPad er purano dag
 seem like Ipad.POSS. old mark
 Seems like iPad's old mark.

Child-3's mother asked her how is her father, she said, 'bhalona' (bad). Her father heard it from the other room and said-

ki bolecho ami pocha
 what. say.PERF.PRES.3P I.1SG. bad
 What did you say, I am bad?

ami boli nai
 I.1SG say.PRES.1P NEG.
 I did not say.

ke boleche tahole
 who.3SG say.PERF.PRES.3P then
 Who said it then?

musik boleche
 music say.PRES.PERF.3P
 The music said (A song was running in the TV at that moment).

Child-3's mother found one of her earrings left open in the jewel box, she said-
 kaner dulta ke khullo
 ear.POSS. ring.DEF who.3SG open.PERF.PRES.3P
 Who opened the earring?

lait jalate giye khule geche
 light on.PERF.PRES.3P go.PRES. open.PERF.PRES. go.PERF.PRES
 It opened while I was turning on the light.

dogi niye geche
 dog take.PERF.PRES. go.PERF.PRES.3P
 The dog took it, etc.

Child-4:

Among all the participating children, child-4 shifts blame more and frequently. According to his mother, he is very naughty and keeps doing something wrong every day; and then puts the blame on others without any hesitation.

ami ki porday hat muchte giyechilam
 I.1SG what curtain.LOC. handwipe.PRES.PERF. go.PERF.PAST.1P
 Did I go to wipe my hand on the curtain?

batashe porda ure hate laglo
 wind.LOC. curtain fly hand.POSS. touch.PERF.PRES.1P
 The wind blew the curtain and it touched my hand.

Child-4 also shifts blame on his cousin brother or on the house helpers. One day he tried to open a muffin pack; he pulled it so hard that the muffin jumped out of the packet and dropped on the floor. His father said-

tomar shobshomoy erokommone-hoy
 your.POSS. always like
 You always think like this.

ami kichu kori nai papa
 I.1SG. anything do.PERF.PRES.1P. NEG. dad
 I did not do anything dad.

paket ta bhalo chilo na
 packet.DEF. good. stay.Past.3P NEG.
 The packet was not good.

The most fascinating aspect of children's blame shifting is that they blame inanimate objects, circumstances, and even animals as well as humans.

Child-5:

Child-5 tends to forget answers during exams. Once, he forgot how to solve a problem during his KG-1 maths exam. Though he practiced the problem at home, he could not answer it at the exam.

ei shohoj onko.ta paro nai keno
 this.SG easy math.DEF can.PERF.PRES NEG why?
 Why could you not do this easy math?

The child replied-

oi shomoy pencil bhen.ge gelo tai.
 that time pencil.SG. break.PERF.PRES. go.PAST.3P so.
 The pencil broke right at that time!

One morning when he was going downstairs, he fell. Then he started crying. His father who was with him, said that child-5 was rushing and skipping stairs, so he fell. It was his mistake. But the child told his mother-

nicher dadu ki bhanga shiri baniye.chen
 ground floor grandpa what break.PAST. stair.PL. make.PERF.PAST
 Grandfather from the ground floor made such broken stairs!

As he is a crybaby, he also cries while playing with other children.

oder jonno ami out hoye gelam.
 them.PL. for Ist out get.PAST go.PERF.PAST.
 I got out of the game for them!

Few more examples-

ami ki gate er baire jete cheyechi
 I.1.SG what gate DET. outside go.PERF.PRES want.PERF.PAST.1P
 Did I want to go outside the gate?

kalo kukur.ta takiye.chilo tai gelam
 black dog.DEF. look.PERF.PAST so go.PERF.PAST.1P
 The black dog was staring at me so I went.

glass theke pani emni shirt e pore gelo
 glass from water like that shirt.SG. drop. go.PAST.3P
 Water spilled on my shirt just like that!

baba mone hoy choshmar upor boshechilo tai bhenge.che
 father.3P seems like eyeglasses.SG on sit.PAST so break.PAST.3P
 Seems like father sat on his eyeglasses so it broke.

ajke shokal howa dekhbo tai raat jege tv dekhchi
 today dawn break watch.FUT.3P so night wake tv watch.PERF.PAST.1P
 Today I will watch the dawn breaking so I am watching tv late at night.

Child-6:

This child has a weird habit of licking walls. When his father asked him why he keeps on doing that, he said –

shada wall.e ekta dag chilo porishkar korlam
 white wall.DEF one mark is.PAST clean do.PERF.PAST.1P
 I was cleaning a mark from the white wall.

The following day, when he was licking the wall once more, his mother scolded him, and he remained silent without making any further comment.

This child does not like to eat vegetables. When his mother forced him to eat, he said -

dekho ekta poka ache torkarir bhitor
 look.IMP.3SG one insect.SG. is curry.POSS inside
 Look there is an insect inside the curry.

He keeps making new excuses every time to avoid eating vegetables, like- they are not cooked properly or the only vegetable he detests is carrot etc.

When Child-6 loses any game against his sister (9 years old), he puts blame on his sister or on the game, like –

apu amake hariyeche iccha kore
 sister.3SG. me.1SG lost.PERF.PAST.3P purpose do.PAST.
 Sister made me lose on purpose.

OR

ami birokto hocchilam tai jiti nai
 I.1SG bore to be.PERF.PAST.1P so win NEG
 I was bored so I did not win.

Child-6 mostly blames his sister and inanimate objects or factors. Some of his common excuses are –

dudh.to apur dhakkay pore gelo
 milk.DEF sister.POSS. push spill.PAST go.PAST.3P
 Milk spilt because sister pushed me.

ami shudhu khelchilam eta kibhabe porlo
 I.1SG only play.PAST.1P this how fall.PAST.3P
 I was only playing; how did it fall?

ami kori nai o koreche
 I.1SG do.PAST NEG. she do.PAST.3P
 I did not do it, she did.

Blaming others is a common behaviour among young children. So, it is important to help them learn to take responsibility for their own actions and choices.

Child-7:

This girl is really energetic, conversational, and fun-loving. In the housing society where they stay, she interacts with a lot of kids, she plays with them, speaks to their parents, grandparents; she even likes to talk to the gate guards, and vendors. Child-7 can therefore carry on a conversation for longer and is adept at using complex or compound sentences.

As she is very active and naughty- she keeps breaking things, making sounds and other mistakes like not touching the objects or electronic gadgets she is not allowed to touch. One day she was talking to the laundry man, which her mother forbids her to do.

tomake bole.chi oporichito karo shathe kotha boltena
 you.DEF.2SG tell.PAST.PERF.1P unknown anybody with talk tell.FUT.3P NEG.
 I told you not to talk with strangers!

Ami bolte chai nai anke amake dekeche
 I.1SG talk.FUT. want NEG uncle me call.PRES.PERF.3P

I did not want to talk, uncle called me. (Actually she ran to him to talk.)

lipstick.ta ke bhenge.che
lipstick.DEF who.3P break.PAST.PERF.3P
Who broke the lipstick?

ami dekhlam o dhorlo
I.1SG see.PAST.1P she touch.PAST.3P
I saw she touched it (pointing at her elder sister).

Some more examples are like-

ma tumi dako nai tai school er deri hoyeche
mother you.3SG wake.3P NEG so school.POSS late happen.PAST.PERF
Mother you did not wake me up, so I am late for school.

tv remote ta shob shomoy ke mati te fele
tv remote.DEF. always who.3P floor.DEF drop.3P
Who always drops the tv remote on the floor?

ami homework likhechilam kintu ure giyeche batashe
I.1SG homework write.PAST.PERF.1P but fly go.PAST.PERF wind
I did the homework but the wind blew the paper away!

mojar dudh khacchilam glass.ta kibhabe pore gelo
tasty milk drink.PAST.PERF glass.DEF. how drop go.PAST.PERF.3P
I was drinking the tasty milk but how did the glass fall!
[By adding words like tasty, pretty, etc., she tries to defend her innocence]

amake boko keno egula ami kori na
me.1SG scold why these me.1SG do.1P NEG
Why do you scold me, I did not do these.

And Child-7 tends to blame her sibling or the housekeeper the most.

Child-8:

Child – 8 is the middle child of three siblings. She has two brothers. The younger child is only few months old. But still Child - 8 sometimes blames on the infant like –

beibi kadche shune jetegiye pani ta pore gelo
baby.1SG cry.PAST.PERF. hear.1P go.CONT. water.DEF drop go.PAST.PERF.3P
I heard the baby crying and tried to go there so, the water fell (baby was with the mother).

She might even blame the table for not being even, like –

tabil ta baka tai dudher glas ta daray nai
 table.DEF. curve so milk.POSS glass.DEF stand NEG
 The table was uneven so the milk glass could not stand straight and fell.

Like other kids, she also blames her elder brother mostly.

bhaiya dhakka diye amake feleche
 brother push.PAST me.1SG fall.PAST.PERF.3P
 Brother pushed me so I fell down.

One day she left her jacket at school and when her mother asked where it was, she said that the teacher did not remind her, so she forgot to bring it.

More of this child's blame shifts are like -
 tumi age bolo nai eta kora thik na
 you.3SG before say NEG this do.PRES.CONT right NEG
 You did not tell me before that this is not right.

putul ta bhalo chilo na tai hat khule geche
 doll.DEF good was NEG so hand open go.PAST.3P
 The doll was not good so the hand came off.

porte boshe khuda peyechilo tai ar pori nai
 study sit hungry get.PAST.PERF so more read NEG
 I felt hungry when I sat to study so, I did not continue.

Moreover, the housemaid or the driver are also blamed sometimes.

The amazing feature of Child blame shifting varies from child to child; even children of the same age can differ in their blame shifting practice. So, it is very interesting to observe the young kids blame shifting.

Child-9 and Child-10:

Even though these two children were observed individually, their language use was similar enough that their data could be looked at as a whole. One child is 3 years and 4 months old, and the other is 3 years and 7 months. They live with their parents and grandparents, so they are always watched by an adult. Because of this, they couldn't just put blames at anyone. According to the observed data children's shifting of accountability at this age is remarkably harmless. They do not exhibit many variations

in sentence structure or in the selection of the party or parties that can be held accountable. Their blame shifting is really basic. Like-

kibhabe phuldani.ta pore gelo
 how vase.DEF. fall go.PAST.3P
 How did the vase fall!

hothath dekhi pore.ache ekhane
 suddenly see. PERF.PRES.1P fall.PERF.PAST here
 The vase fell here all of a sudden.

bhat.gula pore geche plait.ta choto
 rice.PL fall.PAST go.PERF.PAST plate.DEF small
 The rice fell because the plate is small.

ami jani na ke tomar phone dhorlo
 I.1SG know NEG. who.3P your.2P phone touch.PERF.PAST.3P
 I don't know who touched your phone.
 [But actually Child-10 touched the phone]

Most of the time, this child blames people, particularly the people who live with him. Apart from directly blaming others, children of this age commonly engage in the following basic routine behaviours:

- a) silently stand with their head down,
- b) do not look at the adult directly,
- c) start to cry,
- d) run from the place and/or
- e) apologize and admit their mistakes.

As was already noted, at this age, blaming seems more like an explanation than an irresponsible behaviour. Nonetheless, it is also undeniable that a child may change the subject of an argument or shift blames even at the age of 3.

4. Data Analysis

Based on the data presented above, it can be assumed that children differ in their ability to shift blame to their age level. Two of the participants were three years old, and they had little or no understanding of blame shifting. They had not reached the age where their family members would allow them to do anything without supervision. As a result, they had little experience making mistakes and shifting blame. There was no pressure or fear applied to them, so the few instances of their blame shifting sentences

can be interpreted as 'excuses'. According to the observed data, children at the age of four (or 3.9 months and above) begin to shift blame in a meaningful way. As they age, they become more and more inclined to place blame on others for their own shortcomings.

Data also show that kids who have a brother or sister are more likely to blame them for something. This is because, in their minds, they have to blame someone for everything. The single child places the blame on their parents, their household staffs, or the world at large. As was mentioned before, blaming is a negative issue in child psychology if it persists over time or is indicative of a larger behavioural problem.¹¹ However, the aforementioned information allows us to settle that blaming is a natural part of a child's language development, up until the point where it becomes habitual.

5.1. Blame shifting and Child Meaning Acquisition

How children shifts blame can give insights into the intricate processes involved in meaning acquisition and social development. It can tell us a lot about how children learn what things mean and how they grow as people. Playing a blame game can be related to learning about responsibilities, understanding how causes and effects work, and getting more empathetic. Through blame shifting, children usually attempt to avoid negative consequences or punishments, so it can be a part of a child's semantic and pragmatic development, where they learn how to use language to get what they want while connecting with other persons.

At first, children might not fully understand how their acts affect other people and how those actions impact them. But, they are learning about personal accountability and repercussions, as evidenced by their attempts to avoid taking on their own actions by blaming others. As they grow up and learn more, they will realise that self-responsibility is an integral part of being mature and considerate.

Furthermore, shifting responsibility can be seen as a reflection of children's developing moral reasoning as they start to understand the concepts of right and wrong.

The examples of infants and young children blaming inanimate objects or animals in this text are meant to be humorous rather than to point out severe developmental concerns. Some parents though come to their children's defense when they point the

¹¹ James Liu, 'Childhood externalizing behavior: theory and implications', (official publication of the Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nurses, Inc), Vol. 17(3), *Journal of child and adolescent psychiatric nursing*, Vol. 14(3), 2004, pp. 93-103.

finger at others in an effort to protect them or prove that they are in the right; doing so only serves to reinforce the

undesirable behaviour of the child. When a situation is effectively handled and the child is taught what is and is not acceptable behaviour, the tendency to place blame on third parties typically disappears.

The children in the study were all too young to significantly blame others, and their parents, notably their mothers, strived to manage the situation carefully, so the researchers considered it unnecessary to be alarmed about the children's predisposition to blame others. Parents and other caregivers can assist children develop the skills necessary to take responsibility for what they do and become accountable for their actions.

5.2. Blame Shifting as a Part of Cognitive Development

Cognitive factors and social aspects are closely related. Researchers supported that, cognitive pre-requisites for language development is very important. In the 1980s, cognitive linguists contributed to the expansion of research linking language and cognition.¹² The representation of conceptual structures in language is the primary focus of cognitive linguistics. Emphasis is placed acquisition processes such as imitation, perceptual organisation, generating new sentences and on issues such as how aspects of general cognition (such as how the meaning of grammatical constructions is created) are important in describing linguistic structures. It all began with Jean Piaget, who attempted to emphasize the similarities between language and cognition.¹³ Meaning acquisition processes such as imitation, perceptual organization, generating new sentences and reasoning, demonstrate that cognitive development and language acquisition are intrinsically linked.

Developmental aspects related to cognition are also important to child's physiological growth and it goes parallel to language acquisition, depending more on the environment in which the linguistic operations take place. That is why starting from the very first cognitive theory by Piaget to the recent developmental stances on language acquisition (including the usage based approach), the role of cognition in language development has always been discussed with priority. Issues like language constructions or schematizations are results of cognitive maturation influencing

¹² R.N. Campbell, 'Cognitive Development and Child Language', eds. R. Fletcher and M. Garman, (Language Acquisition), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1979).

¹³ Jean Piaget, 'The Construction of Reality in the Child', (New York: Basic Books, 1954).

language acquisition. The presence of it crosses our perception more through the expressive and receptive language use of the children during the whole period of first language acquisition.

Courses of semantic acquisition are more or less identical to all languages and to every child; for example- early utterances, pretend play, imitation, perceptual organization, form-meaning mapping, asking questions, development of conversational skills etc. Aside from these, there are a few unusual and child-specific features in the development process of meaning acquisition that necessarily involve more intense observations than the others. Children's tendency to shift blame is one of a kind and stands out as a distinct trait. According to Freud this is a normal phase of language development found in children in all languages as 'ego defense mechanism'.¹⁴

The renowned scientist Albert Einstein once put it like, "a person who never made a mistake never tried anything new", shifting blame can be seen as one of the stages of development where

mistakes are made. And making mistakes and learning from them is an essential part of child development.

5.3. Blame Shifting: An Innovative Phase in Child Language Development

Ground-breaking child language development includes blame shifting, which is an example of the child's creative effort in language use. As a result, the topic of how children learn to blame others or manipulate language in such an inventive way may arise. The findings suggest that one component in children's creative use of language is their ability to draw on their memory and reason to convey meaning through the use of words and contexts they have heard or seen before. According to the data, contextual meaning is not learned in a linear fashion, nor do children need direct one-on-one data input from adults; rather, they pick up on these elements as quickly as possible from their language surroundings mostly.

However, this unique perspective on the continuing debate over cognitive and linguistic problems investigates the 'Poverty of Stimulus' (PoS) argument in language learning. Chomsky appears to be the first to use the phrase "the poverty of the stimulus".¹⁵ It contends that the linguistic input received by children is insufficient to account for the rich and rapid development of their knowledge of their first language(s)

¹⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The ego and the mechanisms of defense*, (United Kingdom: Taylor and Francis, 2018).

¹⁵ Noam Chomsky, 'The debate between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky', ed. Patelli-Palmarini, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1980).

via general learning mechanisms.¹⁶ However, if the child's social interaction information is restricted, the capacity to utilize such minimal data to build such a sophisticated variety of verbal skills is certainly surprising! It posits that, beyond the peripheral processing mechanisms, there are forms of knowledge and principles of various kinds that influence the nature of acquired information, but in a very limited and highly organized manner.

Chomsky responded to the concern by formulating the concept of "innate knowledge".¹⁷ According to him, what the stimulus lacks, the organism makes up for with its own (genetically given) resources; Citing Socrates and Descartes, Chomsky asserts that people

possess innate knowledge, or information that cannot be obtained from the environment since the stimulus does not reflect what the mind creates in response to stimulation.¹⁸ Which indicates that the basic rules of language are already in the mind before a person is born.

After closely analyzing the collected data, I asserted that child language innovation is dependent on both environmental input and innate ability. Both factors contribute to the child's exploration of meanings. Thus, neither strict innateness nor total reliance on environmental input can be solely credited for a child's successful language development. Children without a health condition rely more on their cognitive ability to use a language fluently and creatively; additionally, this ability enables them to progress and utilize previously stored information for more proficient language use.

6. Conclusion

The acknowledgement of the impossibility of representing children from different cultures as a common background to reflect the meaning acquisition process is at the heart of this study.

These meanings emerged from the interactive, participatory nature of data collection and intensive data analysis.

Blame-shifting, also known as "blaming the victim," is a form of shifting responsibility and making up stories. As limit is set or confronted to them about their behaviour, they shift the conversation back to the person, putting him/her on the defensive.

¹⁶ Alexander Clark and Shalom Lappin, 'Linguistic Nativism and the Poverty of the Stimulus', (John Willey & Son, 2011).

¹⁷ Noam Chomsky, 'Aspects of the Theory of Syntax', (Cambridge: MIT Press 1965).

¹⁸ Noam Chomsky, 'The debate between Jean Piaget and Noam Chomsky', ed. Patelli-Palmarini, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1980).

Children's shifting of blame is a special kind of moral judgment that emerges during verbal development and related to cognitive development and maturation too. It has both social and intellectual components, regulates conduct on the part of others, depended on social cognition, and demands justification as a social act. These distinguishing characteristics set blame shifting apart from other phenomena, such as anger, event evaluation, and wrongness judgments.

A person's cognitive development, or how they learn to think, reason, and comprehend their surroundings, is a lifelong process. It can be classified into various stages, each of which is marked by specific changes in cognitive capacities, and is closely tied to age and maturity. Although there are certain broad patterns in cognitive development that can be seen, each child may have a different understanding and application of blame shifting. Because of this, it cannot be assumed that all children will begin blaming others at the same time or in the same manner.

Moreover, in terms of meaning acquisition, blame shifting can be related to the way individuals learn to assign meaning to events and situations. For instance, if a child grows up in an environment where blame is frequently placed on others, he or she may learn that this is an acceptable way to handle challenging situations. In contrast, if a child is taught to accept responsibility for their actions and to work towards solutions, they may be less likely to engage in blame-shifting behaviour.

Children shifting blames can be upsetting for parents or caregivers. However, it is essential to approach the situation in a manner that teaches the child to accept responsibility for his or her actions. Parents and other adults who are responsible for children can help them take responsibility for their actions by taking a number of actions when they engage in blame shifting. First and foremost, it's crucial to acknowledge the child's emotions and provide a secure environment in which they can express themselves. Second, help the child understand that accepting responsibility is an important part of growing up in order to promote responsibility-taking. Third, set an example of accountability by owning up to your mistakes and finding solutions. Fourth, refrain from punishing the child for assigning blame because doing so might encourage the behaviour. Fifth, give more attention to finding solutions than placing blame, and work with the child to figure out what they can do differently in the future. In order to promote the behaviour going forward, reward the child when they accept responsibility for their actions. By following these steps, parents and caregivers can try to help children learn to take responsibility and avoid blame shifting behaviors turn to a crucial developmental issue.

The age range of the participants in this study was generally limited to 3 to 5 years, which opens the door for future studies on this topic to include children older than 5 years and examine their phase of blame-shifting. Although I have only casually observed a few children between the ages of 9 and 11, I have found that they shift blame more frequently than the younger children do, and their language use in relation to this is more sophisticated and logical. This might serve as a hint or a place to start for any future research on this subject.

This work has always sought to stand on the articulations of language acquisition participants as they made sense of their existence and life experience. Moreover, the participants' language constructions were analyzed to examine the relationship between these children and their family members. Through a detailed observation of their language use and co-constructive nature of meaning making endeavor, I tried to present an account of the meaning acquisition process of the Bengali children I chose as my research participants.