

# First Language Acquisition in Sentence by Three- Years-Old Child: a Case Study of a Karonese Child

Dessi Septaria Ginting<sup>1</sup> Rahmad Husein<sup>2</sup> Anni Holila Pulungan<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>*English Applied Linguistics Study Program, State University of Medan, Medan, Indonesia*

\*Corresponding Author: [dessiginting91@gmail.com](mailto:dessiginting91@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

This research is entitled the first language acquisition in sentence by three-year-old child: a case study of a karonese child. this research applied descriptive qualitative method. the data of this research are obtained from the utterances of a three-year-old child, name Josua and Gracia. this research investigates the sentences that can be produced by a three-year-old child. The factors that affect their in acquiring the first language. the writer has done an observation for three months to find out the data. in conclusion, the research subject in this research is able to produce some sentences based on its purpose as the communication function, environment and family are important factor that helps the children in acquiring the first language. the research subject usually imitates the words that they has heard. the first acquisition process stars with one-word utterance to two-word utterance.

**Keywords:** *First language, First language acquisition process, Three-year-old*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Human being is the most complicated creature of God. There is a system in human beings that make them different with the other creations. The system is language. Language is so basic to our existence that life without language is difficult to envision because language is a fundamental aspect of our daily lives. Language is a way for human to communicate ideas and expressions among the others because language facilitates human relationships with others and help us understand this world. So, language is a complicated system in human life. Language is a set of rules used by its speakers as the tool of a communicative interaction in the society (Clark and Clark, in Siahaan 2008:141). Human being will acquire the language from birth. The process of acquiring the language will start just days after being born. A baby will hear the sounds of the people around him/her, especially the sounds of his/her mother. A baby will grow up along with the development of his/her language. Parents are the most important factor as an input that can help a baby to acquire the first language and the other people around the baby. When a mother communicates to her baby, her baby will listen to her sounds and the baby will try to produce single syllable, vowel-like sounds that are called as cooing. Children will acquire their first language from the people around them. There are several stages that must be passed by the babies during the process of language acquisition; the babies try to produce sounds, such as cooing stage, babbling stage,

holophrastic stage, telegraphic stage, and multiword stage. All of those stages are the same for other babies in the world during the process of language acquisition. Up to the age of one or two months a baby will cry when uncomfortable or hungry. They will also vocalize in response to see their mother. Between one and six months a baby will produce a whole range of sounds.

In acquiring the language, a child has variation of time. It does not only depend on the age, but it also depends on some factors, such as nature, input, and social background also. We cannot compare a child with the others in the process of acquiring the language because they have different factors that help them to acquire it. The way a child uses the language and chooses or combines words to be a sentence is the process of how a child understands and begins to create a sentence. At around two years old, a child already understands to combine two words even though it is not clear. At the age up two years old, a child will try to make a sentence in two or three words and sometimes we just hear the last words or sounds. All of those words have meanings, but they are not like sentences they are just words. The goal of acquiring the language is to become a member of a society of the speakers. The speakers have to learn the structure and the usage of a language also. In the period of acquiring the first language the development of the language in many levels increases rapidly, such as phonology, morphology, vocabulary and syntactic level. A child needs to learn the sound system called phonology that is to study how sounds are organized and used in naturally.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Language Acquisition

Language acquisition is the process by which humans acquire the capacity to perceive and comprehend language, as well as to produce and use words and sentences to communicate. Language acquisition is one of the quintessential human traits, because non-humans do not communicate by using language. Language acquisition usually refers to first-language acquisition, which studies infants' acquisition of their native language. This is distinguished from second-language acquisition, which deals with the acquisition (in both children and adults) of additional languages. The capacity to successfully use language requires one to acquire a range of tools including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and an extensive vocabulary. Language can be vocalized as in speech, or manual as in sign. The human language capacity is represented in the brain. Even though the human language capacity is finite, one can say and understand an infinite number of sentences, which is based on a syntactic principle called recursion. Evidence suggests that every individual has three recursive mechanisms that allow sentences to go indeterminately.

These three mechanisms are : gelatinization, complementation and coordination. Furthermore, there are actually two main guiding principles in first language acquisition, that is, speech perception always precedes speech production and the gradually evolving system by which a child learns a language is built up one step at a time, beginning with the distinction between individual phonemes. Philosophers in ancient societies were interested in how humans acquired the ability to understand and produce language well before empirical methods for testing those theories were developed, but for the most part they seemed to regard language acquisition as a subset of man's ability to acquire knowledge and learn concepts. Some early observation-based ideas about language acquisition were proposed by Plato, who felt that word-meaning mapping in some form was innate. Additionally, Sanskrit grammarians abated for over twelve centuries whether humans' ability to recognize the meaning of words was god given (possibly innate) or passed down by previous generations and learned from already established conventions: a child learning the word for cow by listening to trusted speakers talking about cows.[6] In a more modern context, empiricists, like Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, argued that knowledge (and, for Locke, language) emerge ultimately from abstracted sense impressions.

These arguments lean towards the "nurture" side of the argument: that language is acquired through sensory experience, which led to Rudolf Carnap's *Aufbau*, an attempt to learn all knowledge from sense datum, using the notion of "remembered as similar" to bind them into clusters, which would eventually map into language. Proponents of behaviorism argued that language may be learned through a form of operant conditioning. In B. F.

Skinner's *Verbal Behavior* (1957), he suggested that the successful use of a sign, such as a word or lexical unit, given a certain stimulus, reinforces its "momentary" or contextual probability. Since operant conditioning is contingent on reinforcement by rewards, a child would learn that a specific combination of sounds stands for a specific thing through repeated successful associations made between the two. A "successful" use of a sign would be one in which the child is understood (for example, a child saying "up" when he or she wants to be picked up) and rewarded with the desired response from another person, thereby reinforcing the child's understanding of the meaning of that word and making it more likely that he or she will use that word in a similar situation in the future.

Some empiricist theories of language acquisition include the statistical learning theory. Charles F. Hockett of language acquisition, relational frame theory, functionalist linguistics, social interactionism theory, and usage-based language acquisition. Skinner's behaviorists idea was strongly attacked by Noam Chomsky in a review article in 1959, calling it "largely mythology" and a "serious delusion." Arguments against Skinner's idea of language acquisition through operant conditioning include the fact that children often ignore language corrections from adults. Instead, children typically follow a pattern of using an irregular form of a word correctly, making errors later on, and eventually returning to the proper use of the word. For example, a child may correctly learn the word "gave" (past tense of "give"), and later on use the word "give". Eventually, the child will typically go back to learning the correct word, "gave". The pattern is difficult to attribute to Skinner's idea of operant conditioning as the primary way that children acquire language. Chomsky argued that if language were solely acquired through behavioral conditioning, children would not likely learn the proper use of a word and suddenly use the word incorrectly. Chomsky believed that Skinner failed to account for the central role of syntactic knowledge in language competence. Chomsky also rejected the term "learning," which Skinner used to claim that children "learn" language through operant conditioning. Instead, Chomsky argued for a mathematical approach to language acquisition, based on a study of syntax.

### 2.2 Factors that Support First Language Acquisition

Many factors affect first language acquisition, and there can be significant variation in the age at which children reach a particular developmental stages.

1) *Natural Factor*. Humans are born with a natural ability to learn language. Chomsky argues that children have the capacity to acquire language because they are born with an innate knowledge of language called as Language Acquisition Devices (LAD) cited in Simanjuntak, (1987:161-162). That innate knowledge will develop optimally after getting stimulus from the environment. The stimulus is the input that the child

receives from the environment. The utterances that produced by the child after getting the stimulus known as the output. The process of obtaining through this device is natural. Children are able to accept what is going around them including acquiring their first language.

2) *Input*. Troike (2006:108) states that in language acquisition input is important for children in acquiring the language. Input is the materials that enable the language acquisition take place. Input is influenced by the source, form and intensity. The source of the input comes from the people around the children including parents, caregiver, environmental and electronic devices. Children get the input in the form of utterances that they hear from the people around them (Erillia, 2011). Parents as the closest people of the children have the important role to give the input by the direct communication. Beside parents and people around the children, electronic devices also can give the input. Those electronic devices are Tv, handphone, electronic, and also DVD/videos. Children nowadays spend their time to watch television programs, play games in gadget and watch videos. The form of input is sound. Sound is dominant for the children. They listen to the input by the form of sound. They will imitate what they hear around them. It can be the sounds of human or non human (electronic devices) and how often the input is heard by the children. Children who have sufficient intensity in hearing the input will help them develop their language skill. That's why input has the important role in children's language skill development.

3) *Social Background*. Social background includes the family structure, social group, and cultural environment that varies considerably in child language acquisition (Vigotsky, 1978:103). Family social class is a composite by income, level of education and occupation. Usually, it is divided into lower class, middle class and upper class. Most of the studies show that children from lower socio economic groups are less fastes in acquiring the vocabulary than children from higher groups who have opportunities to master many vocabularies in language acquisition process. The socio economic status and the education of parents also have the important role in providing the input for children to acquire the language. Differences may arise because of different use of language by parents.

### 3. METHOD

According to Bungin (2001:123) data are the information material about the subject of research. The data refer to rough materials researchers collect from the object of they are studying or research. The source of data is very significant in the research. According to Arikunto (2006:129) source of data is the subject where the data can be gotten. Lofland and Lofland in Moleong (2006:157) state that the main data sources used in qualitative research is words and actions. Bungin

(2001:129) also states that data sources is the first source where the data gotten. The data source is the data which are gotten from the source of data directly or the first source in the place of research (Bungin, 2001: 128). The data have correlation with the subject of the research and are used as the main data for conducting a research. The data of this research are utterances of the research subject. The source of data is a three-year-old child, they was born in Medan. As the subject of this study are 2 children of Karonese in Jalan Parang II Padang Bulan Medan. The children are Joshua and Gracia.

#### A. *Data collection*

Data collection are acquired from naturalistic observation method. The writer observed, recorded, heard, and wrote the research subject utterances. Observation is the way of collecting data by observing the phenomena being researched. Arikunto (2006:229) states that observation is an effective ways to complete the research with observation form as an instrument.

#### B. *Data condensation*

Data condensation refers to the process of the qualitative research. Bogdan and Taylor (in Moleong, 2006: 4) state that qualitative method is used as research procedures that resulted descriptive data containing of spoken and written words and people behaviour which can be observed. In other word, qualitative research is a research procedure that will result in descriptive data and relies on narrative description.

#### C. *Data display*

The data display refers to a group of information which can be used as the guidance for the researchers to make a conclusion and as the base to take a further action. Generally, the utterances that had been condensed were displayed.

#### D. *Data conclusion/verification*

The data should be concluded and verified after reducing and displaying it. All the data that had been collected on the observation, recording and interview needed to be verified before the researcher took the final conclusion.

## 4. RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

The data in this study were got based on the data that have been collected. The sources of data were utterances that had taken from a three-year-old Karonese child as the research subject. There are three research problems that should be answered by this research. This problem was answered by using the theory of language acquisition which is nativist theory.

After collecting the data that were taken from the steps of collecting data, the writer analyzed the data based on the theories of language acquisition. Moleong (2006:104) states that data analysis is a process of categorizing, systemizing data into pattern, category, and basic essay unit to find out the theme and to formulate the hypothesis as suggested by the data. Data analysis is the data that were used by the writer to classify and

arrange the data, to make it so easy for the writer easily to write the findings. The purpose of data analysis is to describe and classify the data so that the problems can be solved exactly by the writer. The data analysis in this research was done after the collecting data had complete. The writer classified and arranged the data

The factors that affecting the research subject in acquiring the first language. Based on the observation that has been done by the writer to the subject, the writer found out that the subject could acquire the language well. This means that Language Acquisition Devices (LAD) worked well. He could acquire the first language because there is a LAD allowed him to acquire the language. It showed from the development of his language. He could learn a new word and could utter it. He got the stimulus from the environment as the input in the form of the words or the language sounds and then he tried to produces the utterances as the output. He could communicate

Input factor in acquiring the language, the children need the input to help them to acquire the language. It is important because input is the materials that enable the language acquisition take place. Input is influenced by the source, form and intensity. The role of the input to help the children in acquiring the language is very important. Based on the observation done by the writer to the research subject the writer found out that the research subject got the input from the environment. The language that the subject heard was primarily the language that he heard at home and much of that language come from the people around him. The research subject imitated anything that he saw and heard. He learned new words and some actions from his parents or people around him. The subject also got the input from the electronic devices such as Tv, DVD/Videos and smartphone. He liked watching cartoon on cable Tv in channel Nick Jr. such as Paw Patrol, Pororo, Max and Rubby, Dora and friends, Rusty Rivets and so on. Besides that, he also liked to listen to the children's song by DVD/videos and sometimes by smartphone. He attended to the sounds that he heard and then tried to utter it. His mother also said that her child often imitated something new both from other people, Tv programs and music or children's song. For example, when the research subject heard the word 'bauk asem' in the sentence 'Joshua bauk , belum mandi' produced by his mom. He learned a new word „bauk asem'. Unconsciously, he attended to that word and he imitated that word. In other occasion the subject uttered the word 'bauk' when he smelled his mom or other people around him who had not yet had a bath. The word 'bauk' means „the strings smell of sweat". Besides that, the research subject also liked to imitate some action from other people or the characters on his favorite cartoon such as imitate his father how to driving a car or act as Ryder, the character on his favorite cartoon.

Social background is quite influential in the acquisition of the language. Generally, language usage is influenced by social background including economic status, social, and environmental or culture. In this case, the subject research comes from middleclass family and he was a Bataknese. His father was a bachelor and

worked as a government employee. His mother was a house wife and her last education was senior high school. Based on his social interaction activity, the research subject was able to interact and communicated with the people around him both interaction with his parents, other family members, friends and his neighbors. The interaction and communication happened when the subject got the stimulus and then he would response it. He was able to use his language by communicate with others, asking questions, answering the questions or telling his experience. His parents also taught him to speak politely and clearly. They would ask him to repeat the correct utterances if he produced the incorrect utterances. It is important in order to help their son to produce the good utterances.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The result of this research shows that in acquiring the first language, the research subject was affected by natural factor, input and social background. The research subject could acquire the first language because he was born with faculties of the mind which is known as Language Acquisition Devices (LAD) that allows him to acquire the first language. This natural factor was also influenced by the input and social interaction. Input helped the research subject so much in acquiring the language. By receiving the input he could get the new words and increase his vocabulary, that he could master the first language. The research subject got the input from the environment, for example, his parents, other family members, people around him, animal sounds, and electronic devices (Tv, DVD/Video, smartphone). Those inputs helped the children to increase their vocabulary. Besides that, social background of the research subject also affected him in acquiring the first language. Mostly the people around the research subject were educated people, so their could get a good language. The research subject imitated the words, sounds, and some action of the people around him. they also learned something new and practice his language skills by interact with people around their.

## REFERENCES

- [1] S, Siahaan. 2008. *Issues in Linguistics*. Yogyakarta: Graha Ilmu.
- [2] M. Simanjuntak. 1987. *Pengantar Psikolinguistik Moden*. Kuala
- [3] Lumpur Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia.
- [4] S Muriel, Troike. 2006. *Introducing Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- [5] R, Erillia. May 2011. *Pemerolehan dan Proses Perkembangan Bahasa Pada Anak*. Retrived from <http://kikynabiby.blogspot.co.id> (May 2017)

- [6] L.S, Vygotsky. 1978. *Mind and Society: The Development of Higher Mental Processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- [7] B, Bungin. 2001. *Metodelogi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada.
- [8] S, Arikunto. 2006. *Prosedur Penelitian Suatu Pendekatan Praktek*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta.
- [9] L, Meleong. 2006. *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: PT. Remaja Rosdakarya.