JOURNAL OF ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDIES
http://jees.ejournal.id

JEES: Journal of English Education Studies

ISSN (Print): 2615-613X || ISSN (Online): 2615-6083

An Analysıs of A Child First Language Acquisition: A Case Study of Phonetic System of A Child 2,3 Years Old

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
First language, phonology, morphology, syntax, language acquisition

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to examine the language acquisition of a child 2.3-year-old in terms of phonology, morphology, and syntax. The method used in this study is a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The subject of this study was a child named Restu Novrizal Ilman. The study focused on analyzing Restu's first language acquisition, specifically in the areas of phonology, morphology, and syntax. In the syntactic analysis, the researcher examined three types of sentences frequently used by Restu namely interrogative, declarative, and imperative sentences. Based on the analysis of these three linguistic components, the result showed that Restu has demonstrated good language development. Although he is not yet able to form complete morphemes consistently, his speech is generally understandable.

INTRODUCTION

Every human interacts with others through communication in the form of language. Language is very important for human life because it serves as a tool for expressing thoughts and ideas. Language is used by humans from infancy through childhood to adulthood. It is acquired from the moment a person is born. In the beginning, a baby does not have the ability to speak to others. As children grow, language is used not only to express their needs or desires but also as a means of communication. The words and sentences produced by others are associated with various processes, activities, objects, and situations in their surroundings. This means that children relate what they see and hear to their thinking processes (Pateda, 1990).

Children use language as a tool to convey messages to the people around them, especially their family. Parents play an important role in children's language development. Children are taught by their parents how to speak properly in ways that are appropriate for their age level. The systematic process of mastering a language experienced by a child is known as the process of

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language acquisition. A child's first language is usually acquired from the environment in which they live and grow up. This language is known as their mother tongue.

Children's language acquisition begins between the ages of 0 to 5 years. During this period, a child needs attention and support from both parents and the surrounding environment in order to develop proper language skills. In addition, language development typically progresses in line with the child's age. As the child grows older, their language ability also improves. In general, children aged 2 to 3 years are able to produce sentences that contain both a subject and a predicate. Furthermore, children at this stage have also begun to master various types of sentence structures and language functions, such as declarative sentences, interrogative sentences, commands, as well as functions related to providing information, exploring ideas, and expressing persuasion.

In this case, the three sentence forms and functions of language represent a unified system that children typically use to communicate with others and express their intentions. Based on this, the researcher conducted a study on the language acquisition of a child aged 2.3 years, focusing on phonemes, morphemes, and syntax. For syntax is specifically on declarative, interrogative and imperative sentence. These types of sentences have distinct characteristics when spoken by children. Therefore, the researcher is interested in conducting a study entitled *"An analysis of a child first language acquisition: a case study of a child 2.3-Year*

Language acquisition is the unconscious process by which children internalize the grammar, vocabulary, and phonological system of their native tongue through meaningful social interaction rather than through explicit instruction. While individuals may not be aware of the acquisition itself, they unmistakably recognize the communicative function of the language they use. Stephen Krashen in Schutz (2006) argues that acquisition (implicit, subconscious knowledge) is fundamentally different from learning (overt, rule-based knowing). He describes natural acquisition as "a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language" and highlights that only acquisition not conscious rule-learning results in fluent, spontaneous language use.

Sigel and Cocking (2000) conceptualize young children as *active hypothesis-makers* who adjust their internal grammar models in light of repeated input from caregivers and siblings to eventually converge on stable, rule-consistent structures. This view broadens the notion of language acquisition beyond imitation, emphasizing trial-and-error and cognitive restructuring over rote reinforcement.

According to Piaget and others (1951) cognitive development precedes linguistic complexity. In the preoperational stage (approximately ages 2–7), children fabricate internal schemas through symbolic representation. Language acquisition occurs in tandem with these growing cognitive abilities, shifting from one-word utterances to more structured multi-word forms

Skinner (1957) posited that children acquire language through stimulus-response conditioning: they imitate speech and receive reinforcement (e.g., praise), which strengthens the behavior. Although this model effectively describes early vocabulary learning and simple imitation

In general, language acquisition takes place naturally within communities where the target language is spoken, and it occurs informally in response to real communication needs. This contrasts with language learning, which typically occurs in formal and artificial settings and is driven by academic or instructional demands (Schutz, 2006).

These models integrate into a multi-faceted view: Krashen's theory explains why unconscious, natural acquisition not conscious rule learning enables development of intuitive competence; Sigel & Cocking's constructivism captures how children abstract and test grammatical rules via exposure; Piaget's cognitive development provides the mental architecture for the symbolic and multi-word language leap; and Skinner's behaviorism contributes an understanding of early imitation and reinforcement mechanics. Together, they offer a coherent and complementary

explanation of the child's first language development as based on spontaneous communicative desires and family input encouraging grammatical improvisation, which is constrained by gradually maturing cognition and shaped through reinforcement and gradual knowledge.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study is a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. Through this qualitative research, the phonetic system of a child aged 2 years and 3 months is analyzed. The subject of the research was a child aged 2 years and 3 months named Restu Novrizal Ilman. This study generally aims to identify and describe the child's language acquisition, specifically in terms of phonology, morphology, and syntax. By conducting this research, a clearer understanding of the child's language acquisition can be obtained, including elements of phonology, morphology, and syntax that have already been produced as well as those that have not yet produced.

The data in this study were not obtained through treatment or experimentation. During the data collection process, the child was allowed to converse naturally with family members. This approach was intended to create natural situations and spontaneous conversations so that the researcher could obtain authentic data. In this study, natural data was considered to be a key characteristic. The data were collected using recording and note-taking techniques. Recordings were made during actual family communication events. The main instrument in this simple study was the researcher themselves, although recording devices were also used. All data were analyzed qualitatively using a descriptive approach. The steps taken included recording the data and conducting interviews with the child's mother and sister.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Phonology Acquisition of Restu

Phonology is the study of the inventory of sounds (phonemes) and their distribution within a language. It is also defined as the branch of linguistics that examines the sounds of language produced by the human vocal organs. According to Chaer (2009), phonology studies the sounds of language as the smallest units of speech and how these sounds combine to form syllables. A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a language that can distinguish meaning. The study of phonemes is called phonemics, which is a subfield of phonology. Phonology focuses on understanding how sounds function in a language. To determine a phoneme, minimal pairs are often required.

A minimal pair is two words in a language that differ only in one sound (phoneme) and have different meanings. For example, in Bahasa Indonesia, the words *harus* and *arus* demonstrate a minimal pair. The presence of the sound /h/ in *harus* and its absence in *arus* changes the meaning, indicating that /h/ is a phoneme. A common definition of phonemes, as proposed by Lyons, refers to two different phonetic sounds that occur in the same environment and serve to distinguish different words. For example, in English, /l/ and /r/ are different phonemes because they distinguish word pairs such as *light* and *right*, or *lot* and *rot*. Although /l/ and /r/ may sound similar, they carry different meanings and thus function as separate phonemes.

The result showed sounds produced by Restu are considered as a part of phonemes. Where he often produced phoneme vocal like vocal /e/ in the word /enak/ he says /anak/, vocal /a/ in the word /aku/ he says /atu/, vocal /a/ in the word /acem/ means /asem/ (taste), vocal /o/ in the word /oton/ that mean /motor/. And then like vocal /O/ in the word /omay/ means /siomay/ (name of food), the word /okat/ means 'coklat', vocal /A/: in the word /Ambu/ means 'jambu', vocal /*i*/ *i*n the word /isang/ means 'pisang', vocal */e/ in the word*/ eyuk/ means 'jeruk'. Restu is almost able to produce the complete vocal. It can be seen from the word he produced above.

Restu has also been able to pronounce consonants such as consonant bilabial and alveolar: consonant /p/ is bilabial consonant, and /t/ is alveolar consonant. Alveolar consonant in the word /k/ and /*g*/ had never been heard when he produced, for example the word /kerupuk/ he often say

/upuk/, except /k/ that placed in the last word, for example word that he produced is the word 'elek' that means jelek) and in the word 'uduk' (duduk), 'pepek' (bebek).

Restu seems to have great difficulty producing the consonant /r/. He rarely pronounces the sound /r/ clearly. For example, in the word *wafer*, he says *wafel*; in *karet*, he says *kalet*; and even when saying his own name *Restu*, he pronounces it as *Entu*. In some cases, Restu also replaces the sound /l/ with /y/. For instance, in the word *burung*, he says *buyung*; and in *boleh*, he says *boyeh*. This indicates that his ability to articulate certain consonants is still developing.

Morphology Acquisition of Restu

Mulyana (2007), as cited in Rusyanti (2015), states that the term morphology is derived from word *morphology*, which refers to a branch of linguistics that studies the structure or composition of words in terms of grammar. Previously, this field of study was more commonly known as *morphemics*, which is the study of morphemes. However, with the development and dynamics of language, the term *morphology* has become more widely used and accepted.

The results of the research show that most of the words spoken by Restu are monomorphic. For example, for the word *permen* (candy), he says /*men*/; for *susu* (milk), he says /*ucu*/; for *pegang* (hold), he says /*egang*/; for *kue* (cake), he says /*ue*/; for *sukro* (a snack), he says /*uko*/; for *tujuh* (seven), he says /*uju*/; and for *coklat* (chocolate), he says /*okat*/. These words are stand-alone. In the terms of morphology those are called free morphemes**.** In addition to free morphemes, Restu also produces bound morphemes, although sometimes he still feels difficult to articulate it clearly. This may be because he tends to say the words without paying attention to the proper context and situation.

Although Restu is rarely spoken bound morpheme, but it does not mean that all the words that he spoken has not the meaning. There are some words spoken by Restu which can be categorized to bounded morpheme, for example mamah makakn, he said /mama mam/, Restu Jajan he said /Entu jajan/, Abang tunggu he said /apang tunggu/. As we can see, it means Restu has uttered bound morpheme even still in simple words. In that age Restu has uttered many words and it is almost perfect, because it is containing of subject and predicate. Restu has been able to say the words of more than one syllable. For example: in the word satu lagi he said /Atu agi/, the word makan nasi he said /Mam nasi/, in the word mau makan he said Mau Mam, the words beli itu he said /beyi itu/, beli coklat he said /beyi okat/, beli mobilan he said /beyi mbim/, beli motor he said /beyi oton/ and etc. And when he looks his sister wants to go, spontaneously he says /eyit mau ana/ means ka Elit (name of his sister) mau ke mana. And then when there is seller he spontaneously said to his mother /ma ta uang/ means mama minta uang. we can conclude that Restu has made good sentences and he used the sentences accordance to the context, even he still difficult in expressing that sentences clearly.

Syntax Acquisition of Restu

Manaf (2009), as cited in Firdawati (2011), explains that syntax is a branch of linguistics that discusses the internal structure of a sentence. The internal structure being discussed includes phrases, clauses, and sentences. Therefore, the phrase is considered as the smallest unit of syntactic study, while the sentence is the largest. The analysis of Restu's language acquisition involves observing the development of his ability to form sentences. The sentences he currently produces are still in a simple form. Both his parents and the people around him need to pay close attention to what he says, as it is often difficult to understand. Sometimes, the sentences he produces are incomplete or missing certain phonemes. However, despite this, most of the one-word, two-word, or even three-word utterances he produces are generally understandable. The following are the types of sentences he is able to produce:

Declarative Sentences (Sentence News)

Liana (2013) states that a declarative sentence is a type of sentence used to state or convey information to others. It usually describes an event, either in direct or indirect speech. For

example: *"I saw a bus enter Ciliwung this morning"* (in Bahasa Indonesia: *"Saya lihat ada bus masuk Ciliwung tadi pagi"*).

The research shows that Restu is already able to produce declarative sentences. The following conversation between Restu and his sister, Elita, illustrates this: Elita: *Restu lagi makan apa?*. Restu: *Entu mam okat* (meaning: *Restu makan coklat*). Elita: *Mau dong, kakak minta yah?*. Restu: *Iya, nih...*Elita: *Makasih yah!*. Restu: *Iya.* Elita: *Restu beli di mana coklatnya?*. Restu: *Entu beyi di malet* (meaning: *Restu beli di Indomaret*). Elita: *Sama siapa belinya?*. Restu: *Ma papa* (meaning: *Sama Bapak*). This conversation took place when Elita had just returned home and greeted Restu. She asked him questions, and Restu responded using simple declarative sentences to explain what had happened.

From the example above, it is clear that Restu is capable of producing complete sentences. Most of his utterances already contain a Subject (S) and a Verb (V). For instance, in the sentence *"Entu mam okat"*, the grammatical structure is nearly correct, although some phonemes are still imperfect due to his age.

Interrogative sentences

Liana (2013) explains that an interrogative sentence is a sentence used to get a response in the form of an answer. Structurally, interrogative sentences are marked by the use of question words such as *"what"*, *"who"*, and *"when"*, and in written language, they end with a question mark (?). In spoken language, they are often indicated by rising intonation when using question words, or falling intonation when confirming something.

The research shows that Restu has shown the ability to produce interrogative sentences. It can be seen in the following conversation. 'One day, Elita, Restu's sister, was wearing her shoes and had a bag beside her. Restu came from inside the house and noticed that Elita was getting ready to leave. He immediately asked: Restu: *Eyit mu ana?* (meaning: *Elita, mau ke mana?*). Elita: *Elit mau ke sekolah. Dulu ya.* Restu: *Ntu itut* (meaning: *Restu ikut*). Elita: *Restu kan belum mandi. Nanti saja ikutnya. Nanti Elita beliin coklat ya.* Restu: *Iyah, ntu da ikut* (meaning: *Iya, Restu tidak ikut.*) From the sentence expressed by Restu it can be concluded that Restu is already capable of forming basic interrogative sentences completely. His question was relevant to the situation and grammatically understandable, even though his pronunciation and structure are still developing in line with his age.

Imperative Sentences

According to Schuzt (2006) Imperative sentences are used to issue commands, make a request, or give instructions. They are intended to prompt someone to take action and can be either affirmative or negative. Imperative sentences often express urgency or importance and are also referred to as command or request sentences. A command sentence is used to instruct someone to do something.

The result of the research showed Restu has shown the ability to give commands to both his parents and his sister. For example, he said, *"Ma, uka ni,"* which means *"Mama, bukain ini"* while handing a bag to his mother. In another case, he said, *"Eyit, uka patu ntu,"* meaning *"Elita, bukain sepatu Restu"*. These imperative sentences, although phonetically imperfect, but already convey complete and meaningful messages. Based on their structure, such utterances are typical in early stages of child language development, especially in informal and familiar communication settings.

For phoneme mastery, Restu is able to produce all five Indonesian vowel sounds (/a, i, u, e, o/), though he often substitutes /e/ with /a/ for example, pronouncing 'anak' he said '*enak*', and '*aku*' he said '*atu*'. He also frequently omits vowels in certain positions. These patterns align with typical vowel acquisition in children around 2 years old, who tend to master basic vowels earlier than complex consonants. On the other hand, the sound /r/ is rarely pronounced clearly and is often replaced, for instance, '*Restu*' becomes '*Entu*' and '*burung*' becomes '*buyung*'. This reflects a common liquid substitution pattern seen in Indonesian children up to about 3–4 years old.

Alveolar consonants like /k/ and /g/ are often omitted in the middle of words for example '*kerupuk*' becomes '*upuk*', but they tend to appear more consistently at the ends of words or after closed vowels.

For morphemes mastery, most of Restu's speech currently consists of free morphemes, such as *men*, *ucu*, and *okat*. This reflects a fundamental vocabulary typical of children around 2–3 years old. At the same time, Restu has started to use simple bound morphemes, as seen in reduplication (e.g. *mama* → *mamam*) and basic mini-phrases like *Entu jajan* (Restu mau jajan) or *pang tunggu* (abang tunggu). These expressions indicate that he is gradually developing the ability to form bound morphemes and create simple utterances. This pattern of language development aligns with what is usually observed in 2–4-year-old children: they begin to explore affixes and compound word structures, though their usage is often inconsistent.

For syntax mastery, Restu is able to form declarative sentences of two to three words, such as *"Entu mam okat"* means "Restu makan coklat), and can use interrogative sentences (*Eyit mu ana?* means "Elita, mau ke mana?" as well as imperative sentences *Ma, uka ni* means "Mama, tolong buka ini". This reflects his early adoption of a simple S V O structure and telegraphic speech, a stage typically seen in early language development.

Although he sometimes makes structural errors such as inconsistent word order (*ma ta uang* means "Mama minta uang", the pragmatic content and message intent are generally appropriate to the situation. This pattern indicates natural pragmatic syntactic development around age three when children typically begin to understand and use sentence structures beyond mere imitation.

CONCLUSION

A normal child is generally able to pronounce phonemes and words properly, in accordance with the environment and surrounding objects. Although the words produced may initially be unclear or fragmented, this is because of the language development continues progressively. Restu, for instance, began producing words starting from basic nouns and verbs. His vocabulary growth started with a repertoire of simple and often abstract words. The use of nouns and verbs increased through repeated exposure from interactions with family members, such as parents, siblings, or friends either consciously or unconsciously.

Restu has demonstrated the ability to form simple sentences, gradually progressing from one-word to two- and three-word combinations. Although the sentences he produces are still simple and may lack proper sequence, their meaning is generally understandable. His utterances often reflect the use of imperative, declarative, and interrogative sentence types, even if expressed unintentionally. Based on Restu's language use, it can be concluded that a normal child is capable of acquiring a first language as long as brain and neural development are not disturbed. In addition, psychological growth, proper nutrition, and a supportive environment play significant roles in children's motor and linguistic development, especially in their ability to acquire and produce language effectively.

Recommendations for Future Research Development: first is frequency data expansion is needed: record context, number of productions per morpheme item, and variations in family interactions. Second is data triangulation is needed (parent interviews, longitudinal video recording). Third is cross-subject comparison: compare acquisition patterns in other families (of similar and different ethnicities) to assess the dominant role of input theory.

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