

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1 The Background of the Study

Parents and adults alike, are always amazed at the development of their children's language acquisition. From only communicating through crying, cooing and babbling, the infants go through the stages of language development and in no time at all, the children were suddenly able to speak in meaningful words. These acquisitions seemed to be something that we as human being found to be so extraordinary.

The questions on the language acquisition in human infants have always been a fascination through the ages. Human beings have been blessed with the gift of words which differentiate them from other creatures on earth. The realization of the gift that has been bestowed to only the human being made us curious each time we see an infant's development namely from a crying baby into an adult with the capacity of speech.

There had been many research made regarding our curiosity of the language acquisition of human children since the history of mankind. Several of those research had been extreme such as the following examples as found in Fromkin (1983:21-22) and in Gleason (1998:37),

- Psammeticus, an Egyptian pharaoh who lived during the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC believed that language was innate and that when children were isolated after birth from any language, they would acquire the language they had been born with. So, he isolated two children who were then said to have spoken a few words of Phrygian which is the Indo European language of today's Turkey.

- King James V from Scotland in the 15<sup>th</sup> century also performed a similar experiment. It was reported that the children spoke good Hebrew.
- Akbar a Mogul emperor of India in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was also interested to know whether language was innate or acquired through the exposure of adults speech. He ordered a house for two infants and appointed a mute nurse to take care of them in an isolated place. The children did not acquire speech.

From all these early experiments, it can be seen that the underlying motive contained in these early researches showed that people from early days had also been fascinated with the language acquisition of infants. They were interested in knowing how the infants could learn the language. They needed to find out how infants could acquire the language if they were without any human interaction, from the parents and the community they lived in. In most cases it was proven that infants acquired language through the communication between the infants and their parents and caretakers in the environment they lived in. Even though the ability to acquire language seemed to be innate, however, they needed the stimulus of the environment to be able to acquire the language. Infants need other people especially their caretakers to motivate them to communicate namely through crying, cooing, uttering sounds, or meaningful words, which will help them to be able to carry a conversation, to communicate their needs and wants with other people in the community. According to several experts, such as Ingram (1989:131), Taylor (1990:237), Dardjowidjojo (2000:48-49) the speech register that adults tend to use towards infants and children is called 'motherese'. It is a special way of the adults in speaking towards small children. Holzman (1983:26) as cited in Taylor



(1990:237), "A mother 'converses' with her infant by treating any kind of sound, burps, wheezes, random vocalizing babbling – as contributions to the conversation".

As Kuhl (2000:13) further explained that,

"motherese" is instructive,... New data suggest that language addressed to infants plays a much more important role. The universal speaking style used by caretakers around the world when they address infants, often called "motherese" or "parentese" has been shown to be preferred over adult-directed speech by infants given a choice. Moreover, the exaggerated stress and increased pitch typical of infant-directed speech assists infants in discriminating phonetic units. Infant-directed speech also is altered at the phonetic level and these alterations are argued to help infants learn".

It is for the reason of understanding further the use of 'motherese' in our society that the researcher is curious to study how the use of motherese is responsible to the language development of children. Similarly, after reading the work of Dardjowidjojo (2000:49) on the language acquisition of the author's granddaughter, the researcher interest on the use of 'motherese' in an Indonesian child grew. Dardjowidjojo clarified the term he used for motherese in the Bahasa Indonesia is called 'Bahasa Sang Ibu'. He explained that 'motherese' is used because of the motivation in communicating and not because of the need of the caretakers in teaching language to the infant. Therefore, it is due to the need to communicate that adults adjusted their speech register. Dardjowidjojo explained further that the adjustment in the caretaker's speech register served two functions namely to facilitate understanding, and to get the child to be involved in the conversation. The researcher became interested in carrying out an observation on the development of first language acquisition viewed from the interaction between the caretakers and the infants, where the speech register 'motherese' is used. However, it will be limited to the early communication of infants in their natural environment communicating with their caretakers and other people. The researcher wants to discover

whether Indonesian caretakers make use of the special speech register known as 'Motherese' and whether Indonesian infants are also responding similarly or differently to the use of "Motherese" as the other children in another culture and country. The study will be conducted towards the caretakers communicating with two infants that are at the babbling and the holophrastic period in which the infants conversational skills are at the beginning stage. An observation will be made on the use of motherese by the infants caretakers and on the language development of the two infants. The infants reaction to the speech register known as 'Motherese' or what is also known as 'baby talk', 'parentese', 'caretaker speech', or 'child directed speech' will be recorded in a notebook and tape recorder. The infants' utterances and reactions' will be recorded, and the use of motherese by caretakers will be observed, however it is limited to the utterances of the caretakers using motherese and that of the infants in the shapes of their early words. In this study, the researcher will focus on the word 'motherese' instead of the other terms namely 'baby talk', 'parentese', 'caretaker speech', or 'child directed speech'.

## **1.2 The Research Problem**

The research will try to answer the following problems:

1. How do the caretakers (the person who is taking care of the infant) structure their conversations using motherese in communicating with the infants?
2. How does the infant at the babbling period response to the use of motherese?
3. How does the infant at the holophrastic period response to the use of motherese?



### 1.3 The Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study are intended to describe:

1. the use of motherese by the caretakers in communicating with the infants.
2. the development of the first language acquisition of two infants in communicating as a result of motherese by the caretakers where the infants are at the babbling and holophrastic period.

### 1.4 The Scope of the Study

In conducting the study, the researcher will limit her observation on only the interaction between that of the caretakers (namely the parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles also the older siblings, baby sitters etc.) with the infants. The researcher will be concern on only the utterances of the caretakers which uses motherese. Therefore, the study will only be limited to the utterances that the infants and caretakers make. The infants being observed will be at the ages of seven-month old (0;7) and 17-month old (1;5) at the beginning of the research respectively, and by the end of the research, they will be nine months old (0;10) and seventeen-month old (1;6) respectively.

### 1.5 The Significance of the Study

The findings of the study will be useful for:

1. other researchers who are interested in knowing the similarity or differences of the special speech register known as 'Motherese' being observed on two Indonesian infants at the babbling and holophrastic period.

2. lecturers who teach Language Acquisition in Indonesian Universities in enriching their resources on Language Acquisition of Indonesian Children.
3. parents and other adults who practice Motherese in communicating with infants and young children.

