

# CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Study

Language acquisition is a 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 usually refers to the first-Language Acquisition, which study infants' acquisition of their native language. This is distinguished from *Second-Language Acquisition* (SLA), which deals with the acquisition (in both children and adults) of additional languages (David, 1999: 409).

According to Bloor & Bloor (1995) children will come up with the most extraordinary things when they start using a language, such as: cute things, hilarious things, and sometimes, baffling things that may start us wondering whether we should worry about their language development. Children will develop their own strategies for learning whatever they find relevant to learn around them, including a language. Children are much more resourceful, resilient and creative. The psychologist of behaviorism, Paivio & Begg (1981) state that children learn to model their behavior on what goes on around them, be the dress codes, body language, and language uses, usually come first through their own utterances and later through peers in their family, neighborhood or at school. Children are learning how to function adequately in their environment and much of this learning takes place through language itself. This means that the acquisition of language is going on whenever a language is used around the children.

The process of Language acquisition can be seen as running parallel throughout a child's life every day. S/he learns to communicate through natural interactions with her/his environment. The process begins in the early life of a human being and requires a healthy start, sufficient opportunities, and exposure to a care giving environment that allows the child's innate predisposition to learn to communicate to function (Rossetti, 2001). More than half of the world's population today uses more than one language while being connected to the fundamental human activities.

During the language acquisition process large numbers of words have to be taught (Clark, 2003:12). Clark (2003) also states that the first language acquisition requires a comprehensive look at where and when children acquired a language. There are considerable individual differences among children regarding their vocabulary size and the speed with which they acquire new words. Environmental factors such as socio-economic and cultural factors and other factors relating to the home language environment have been found to influence vocabulary development (Hart & Risley, 1995). By the age of 1 the child is able to utter single word utterances, and by the end of the second year they are able to speak 2 to 3 word utterances. This phenomena ease and speed with which children are able to pick up something so absurdly complicated, make the subject more interesting and challenging. One of the factors in acquiring the language by children is child directed speech. Child-directed speech is speech commonly used by parents or caregivers when communicating with children. The basic idea with child-directed speech is that parents modify their speech when talking to children.

It helps the children acquire the more complex construction of the word or sentence.

The process of mastering the language is closely related to the process of acquiring the language. The process of acquiring a language in a child is naturally a process of development. This process is usually called language acquisition. In the process of the development, there are some important things that can be acquired. It involves language comprehension, language production, and language perception of the child in acquiring the language because a child is not born with the knowledge of a particular language. Some psychologists and linguists divide the problem of language acquisition into vocabulary, meaning, and grammar. There are two approaches in language acquisition.

Chomsky (1999:75) defines children in a normal life from two until six years old will acquire language with structure and vocabulary. This is possible because since birth, they have been equipped with such a device, called Language Acquisition Device (LAD). The Language Acquisition Device allows children to analyze the language they hear and extract the rules of grammar that permit them to create brand-new word. But the ability in acquiring language is not relatively same among the children. Brown (1873:90) describes five stages of language development, based on the Mean Length of Utterance (MLU).

*.....Mean length of utterance (MLU) is the average number of morphemes per utterance. It is an index of expressive language development used beyond the stage of single words, when a child uses two or more words together in an utterance- which is the number of morphemes --- basic units of meaning --- toddlers can produce.*

MLU is used as a measurement of each child level in acquiring the language. Children acquire language rapidly at the age of three or four. The

nativists maintain their nature theory that language is basically innate, in which children were born with special unique human talent that can acquire the grammar of a language without adults' instruction or correction.

Language acquisition can be seen as a natural process that will occur to every normal child. Each child will experience similar stages in language development although they have different speed. Language acquisition will be impossible when a child is not interacting with the environment. Through social interaction with family members and those in the community, the child will acquire the first and second language. Therefore, each child acquires language as part of the natural process and as a result of social interaction in the community. Merry (2011: 4) states that language cannot be developed in a vacuum and there is no society alive without language. It means that language is a resource that is available to everyone in a society and the society can exist with the presence of language. There are also several factors that can influence children language acquisition, namely health, social economic status, family members, and gender. Brown (1873) states that the language development by a girl is growing faster than a boy in the first five years. It is indicated by the numbers of vocabulary acquired, the length of the sentence, and understanding of the word.

The study of a language includes sociolinguistics, morphology, grammatics, and others. Morpheme is a part of morphology which is a study of the small units that have a meaning. Morphemes can be broadly divided into two types: free morphemes and bound morphemes. There are free morphemes, that is, morphemes that can stand by themselves as single words and bound morphemes which are generally identified as affixes. Free morphemes fall into two categories:

lexical morphemes and functional morphemes. The first category is that set of ordinary nouns, adjectives, adverbs and verbs that we think of as the words that carry the content of the messages we convey. These free morphemes are called lexical morphemes (Chaer:2009). Peter & Terezinha (2006) state that children usually begin to produce two-morpheme words in their third year and during that year the growth in their use of affixes is rapid and extremely impressive for examples the child uttered *makanan di atas meja*, *di atas/on/* it is kind of functional morphemes, *meja /table/* it is kind of lexical morphemes. Both lexical and functional morphemes are categorized as free morpheme. The word *makanan* it derivatives from word *makan* add with suffix 'an', it changed the grammatical function from verb to noun. And it is known as derivational morphemes (bound morphemes). And as the result child's utterance consist of 4 morphemes (main+an, diatas and meja). The example of child's utterance: *Banyak apel itu*; *apel/* apple/ it is kind of lexical morpheme, *banyak /many/* and *itu/that/*, it is kind of functional morphemes. Her utterance consist of 3 morphemes (*banyak, apel* and *itu* ).

It is believed that children have started to associate groups of sounds with meanings and to use them to express their own intentions. Even children at the age of three to four years have acquired more than 14,000 vocabularies, complex grammatical constructions, and phonological systems of a language. It will become increasingly skillful in how they use a language in a range of setting (David, 1999).

The reseacehr is very much intersted in conducting a study on language acquisition because it gives information on how the children acquire languages. It

is also interesting to observe how the levels of the 3 years old child in mastering the language especially in acquiring the lexical morphemes. Moreover, she is also curious to observe how the environment supports the child in acquiring *Bahasa Indonesia* as his/her natural language. This study will be focused on the Indonesian lexical morphemes in a free (base) form as the consideration to measure the Mean Length of Utterances of Indonesian children at the age of 3 years.

### **1.2 The Problems of the Study**

In relation to the background of the study, the problems of the study are formulated as the following:

1. What are the types of Indonesian lexical morphemes acquired by a child of three years old?
2. How are those types of Indonesian lexical morphemes acquired by a child of three years old?
3. What level of MLU is acquired by by a child of three years old in Indonesia?

### **1.3 The Objectives of the Study**

In connection with the problems, the objectives of this study are:

1. To find out the types of Indonesian lexical morpheme produced by a child of three years old as free morpheme.
2. To describe how those types of Indonesian lexical morphemes acquired by by a child of three years old

3. To measure the level of MLU acquired by by a child of three years old.

#### **1.4 The Scope of the Study**

A study on language acquisition can cover many aspects of the children's progress in the process of acquiring a language. In this research, the researcher intends to observe the process of a child in acquiring the lexical morphemes as the part free morpheme that consist of noun, verb, adjective and adverb. The child who will be observed is the researcher's relative.

#### **1.5 The Significance of the Study**

A study on language acquisition can touch many aspects of a child. Proficiency to the acquisition of a language, findings of this research is expected to provide a valuable input that can enrich the study on the development of language acquisition. It is expected that the findings can show significant relevancy to the theoretical and practical aspects.

Theoretically, the research findings can provide a basis for further research on different stages of the children's language acquisition and to see the application of theories of language acquisition.

Practically, on the other hand, this research can be made as guidelines for adults, teachers, those concerned with an early childhood education, especially parents who are interested in the process of encouraging the young children to speak as related to the theory of language acquisition. It will be a valuable reference in assisting and facilitating the children in the process of language acquisition.