

# CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

## A. The Background of the Study

Human development process begins with prenatal development, baby phase, phase of early childhood, final phase of childhood, adolescent phase, mature phase, and the development of the elderly. The process of language acquisition in children is one thing that needs to be investigated more deeply. According to Nurliah (2013:1) quoted from Eva in *The Acquisition of Free Morpheme by A Two Year Old Indonesian Child*(2013:1) the study of children's language acquisition is interesting to be done.

Children acquire language so readily because it is in their genes. That is, we will argue that children are born with innate knowledge which guides them in the language acquisition task. This innate knowledge, known as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), includes principle common to all human languages, called Universal Grammar (UG). What is innate does not have to be learned-hence language acquisition consist of learning what is peculiar to the language environment (e.g., the particular words of one language or another), and applying the universal principles.

First language acquisition occurs when a child is in the first place without the language has now gained one language. At the time of child language acquisition, children lead to the communication function than the form of the language. Language acquisitions of children have the characteristics of continuity, continuum, moving from one simple word to the combination of words that is

more complicated. Chomsky argued that language acquisition is not only based on nurture, but nature. Children are not born as blank plates but the child has been provided with a tool called a language acquisition device. Each child is shown to have similarities in language acquisition and through the same process in a mastering each language (Dardjowidjojo , 2003:236 ) .

Language acquisition is associated with mastery of the language without realizing something or learned directly, which is without going through formal education to learn. Everyone at some time has witnessed the remarkable ability of children to communicate. As small babies, children babble, coo, cry, and vocally or nonvocally send an extraordinary number of message and receive even more messages (Laura, 2004).The study of language acquisition is very important especially in language learning. Sufficient knowledge about the process and the nature of language acquisition will help determine success in the field of language learning.

First language acquisition is the first language mastered by children which called mother tongue. Every normal child under the age of five years can communicate in the language used in the environment, even without formal learning. In this age generally children have mastered the system of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics.According to David and Jesse (2008:605), children begin analyzing and producing expressions using a generative syntactic system. Creative language use depends on understanding compositionality—how the meanings of complex expressions are a function of their syntax and the meanings of their constituent parts. Mastery of the language development of the child or acquired gradually. Early childhood, especially 4-5 years of age can develop vocabulary. They often repeat the new vocabulary and unique though not yet understand the meaning. In developing the vocabulary, children use fast wrapping which is a process by which children absorb the meaning of a new word after hearing

it once or twice in the dialog. At this early age children begin to combine syllables into words, and words into sentences.

Children learn, on average, ten to fifteen new word meanings each day, but only one of these words can be accounted for by direct instruction. The other nine to fourteen word meanings need to be picked up in some other way. It has been proposed that children acquire these meanings with the use of processes modeled by latent semantic analysis; that is, when they meet an unfamiliar word, children can use information in its context to correctly guess its rough area of meaning. A child may expand the meaning and use of certain words that are already part of its mental lexicon in order to denominate anything that is somehow related but for which it does not know the specific words yet. For instance, a child may broaden the use of *mummy* and *dada* in order to indicate anything that belongs to its mother or father, or perhaps every person who resembles its own parents, or say *rain* while meaning *I don't want to go out*.

There is also reason to believe that children use various heuristics to properly infer the meaning of words. Markman and others have proposed that children assume words to refer to objects with similar properties (e.g., "cow" and "pig" might both be "animals") rather than to objects that are thematically related (e.g., "cow" and "milk" are probably not both "animals"). Children also seem to adhere to the "whole object assumption" — thinking that a novel label refers to an entire entity rather than one of its parts.

One typical language development experienced by children is developmental syntax. In the early period the child uses one word sentences, sentence two words, three word sentences, and so on until the full sentence structure stage (agent - action - object - location). Containing the number of elements in a spoken sentence meaning children can be measured by Mean Length of Utterance (MLU). MLU is a concept that is used to measure the linguistic products produced by

one child. According to Brown quoted from Diane (2001:27-31), at about 1 to 2 years of age the child is in the Stage I and the MLU is 1,75 which is their vocabulary is about 400 words, a child at 2,5 to 3 years is in the Stage II and the MLU is 2,25 which is their vocabulary is about 900 words, a child at 3 to 3,5 years is in the Stage III and the MLU is 2,75 which is their vocabulary is about 1200 a child at 3,5 to 4 years is in the Stage IV and the MLU is 3,50 which has the vocabulary about 1500 words and a child at 4 to 5 years is in the Stage V and the MLU is 4,0 which has the vocabulary about 1900 words. In general, the calculation is done by dividing the number MLU morphemes with a number of speech. That is, the number of utterances required number is 100 main speech of children (Dardjowidjojo, 2010:241). The higher MLU children the higher the child's mastery of the language.

There are some phenomena that we can see in our surrounding area. Many children in their ages, three to five years old can communicate well like teenagers. They can say many words and their length of utterances is good. When we talked to them, they can get what we mean; even they can give suggestion to us. But some children in three to five years old, they can't communicate well. They are not in their position. It means that they can't communicate like their ages. They are unable to say many words and they can't response well when we talk to them. They just say a few words even just keep silent. In relation to that statement, I would like to measure the length of utterances a child four years old and from her utterances, what is the dominant characteristic whether it is question, responses, topic expansion or topic initiation. I would like to see whether she is in her position or not. According to Brown quoted from Diane (2001:31), a child in four to five years old, they are in the fifth stage which the MLU is 4,0 and the vocabulary is about 1900 words.

## **B. The Problem of the Study**

Based on the background of the study, the problems of the study are formulated as the following:

1. What are the stages of Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) in a four-year-old child ?
2. What are the characteristics of child's shortest and longest utterances?

## **C. The Objective of the Study**

Based on the problem of the study, the objectives are

1. to find out language development of a four-year-old child through measuring her MLU.
2. to describe the characteristic of child's shortest and longest utterances, whether it is question, responses, topic expansion or topic initiation.

## **D. The Scope of the Study**

The scope of the study conducts of first language acquisition, particularly the Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) by a four-year-old child.

## **E. The Significance of the Study**

Findings of this study are expected theoretically and practically give much contribution to the world of children language acquisition research. Theoretically, this study becomes the basic of the further research which also interested in investigating the same field with different focus and object. Practically, it becomes some of guidelines for the teacher, adult and also parents who directly touch this area in order to guide their children to be better of developing language especially in their children utterances.