

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Background of the Study

All children acquire language from birth. Second language acquisition begins to occur after a child has learned his or her first language. Children learn language at a stage when they themselves are developing rapidly. Chomsky (1965) defines children in a normal life from two until six years will acquire language with structure and vocabulary. This is possible because since the birth, they have been equipped with such a device, called Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Generally, they acquire one language then they will master another language that is influenced by their environment in different ways.

The issue of how the age at which a person is first exposed to a language that is not his/her first influences the learning experience has been one of the topics most frequently considered in second language acquisition (SLA) research. There are a lot of advantages for introducing a foreign language at kindergarten, the children's brain is open to all sorts of new things and their brains can absorb great amounts of information. Children at such a young age normally do not have any worries or burdens to act as obstacles in the way of learning a new language. And above all, introducing a new language and culture at such a young age, allows the child to be open-minded towards all kinds of different ideas. The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) correspondence to an empirical hypothesis according to which human are more efficient at language learning in the first years

of life. In other words, the CPH states that age of acquisition is an important predictor of ultimate proficiency: the older one starts to learn a language, the smaller the odds of reaching native-like proficiency.

Do children learn languages better than adults do? Most linguists believe this is the case: 'Childhood is the golden age for creating simultaneous bilingual children due to the plasticity and virginity of the child's brain to make for superior ability specifically in acquiring the early sets or units of language' (Lightbown and Spada 1999: 29). Kindergarten children are still in their golden age to acquire language. This neurological flexibility remarks the privilege accomplished by children over adults when learning a language (Lightbown and Spada 1999). It has also been suggested that the muscular plasticity a child may use in the articulation of his/her speech helps producing a native-like accent, which would explain the lack of ability for the production of this level of pronunciation and accent after puberty.

It is believed that the 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 language in a range of setting (David, 1999: 409).

Ingram (1989: 2) notes that the process of acquiring a language can be seen traditionally through some following developments:

1. Prelinguistic Development – birth to end of first year;

2. Single word utterances – from around 1 year to 1,5 years of age;
3. The two-word stage – from around 1,5 years to 2 years of age;
4. Simple and complex sentences – the third year of life.

Child's language is a unique phenomenon because they acquire the language from the environment and sometimes what they say is not what they mean. Roger Brown of Harvard has named that language telegraphic speech (Clark, 1981: 90). Early telegraphic speech is characterized by short, simple sentences made up primarily of content words: words that are rich in semantic content, usually nouns and verbs. The speech is called telegraphic because the sentences lack function words: tense endings on verbs and plural endings on nouns, prepositions, conjunctions, articles, and so on.

The English language is considered as a universal language, mainly because it is the most spoken language worldwide. English is also one of the most studied language all across the world, most of the countries teach it as a second language from primary school. Worldwide we see that most of the communication sources, information and material sold or given to us are in English, for example: films, TV shows, music, documentaries, popular brands, etc. Introducing English to young learners will help them increase their knowledge and communication skill earlier. M. Verspoor and K. Sauter (2000) stated that English sentences can be classified according to communicative functions and patterns into four basic finds: Declarative, Interrogative, Imperative and Exclamatory sentence patterns, they added that when people communicate, they communicate for various reasons, but the four main reasons are:

- To inform someone of something
- To get information from someone
- To get someone to do something
- To express one's attitude about something.

And each of these communicative functions has the following patterns

John is leaving.

Is John leaving?

Leave!

How awful John is leaving!

Children begin to form concepts of gender beginning around age 2, and most children know if they are a boy or girl by the age of 3 (Martin & Ruble, 2004). Between the ages of 3 and 5 years, children develop their gender identity and begin to understand what it means to be male or female. Almost immediately after becoming gender aware, children begin developing stereotypes, which they apply to themselves and others, in an attempt to give meaning to and gain understanding about their own identity.

Preschool educators can help children develop a positive sense of their own gender. Teachers who are familiar with the factors that influence gender identity and their development, and who understand the child's active role in gender identity formation, can more effectively counteract and even neutralize gender bias in their classrooms and attempt to prevent the formation of children's gender stereotypes (Zaman, 2007). Girls and boys develop neither at the same biological rate nor at the same cognitive rate. Since girls generally develop earlier

than boys, researchers often attribute their superior early reading skills in part to this biological factor (Halpern, 2006). The ability to learn and use language contains a female advantage from as early as during the first two years of life.

There is a popular believe that girls are more advanced in language development than boys. There have been a number of reviews of the literature on sex differences in language developmental like:

Jespersen (1922) (in: Macaulay, 1978, 353-363) observe that little girl on the average learn to talk earlier and more quickly that boys; they outstrip them in talking correctly; their pronunciation is not spoilt by many bad habits and awkwardness so often found in boys.

McCarthy (1954) (in: *ibid*) “one of the most consistent finding to emerge from the mass of the data accumulated on language development in favor of girls in nearly all aspects of language than have been studied.

Garai and Scheinfeld in a smaller number of studies came to the same conclusion: “studies of verbal ability have shown that girls and woman surpass boys and men in verbal fluency, correct language usage, sentence complexity, grammatical structure, spelling and articulation, while males tend to excel in verbal reasoning and comprehension (Garai and Scheinfeld, 1968, 198-200).

Furthermore, the sex differences visible in early childhood coincide with those found in adults. For example: boys and men tend to use more aggressive and assertive language than females (Sause, 1976; Cook, Fritz and Cornack, 1985; McCloskey & Coleman, 1992) and girls and woman use more mitigating and cooperative utterances than males (Austin, Salehi and Leffler, 1987).

Here is a transcript containing a fragment of a conversation in the classroom of kindergarten B that the researcher observed in the morning, on Tuesday, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2016:

*Teacher* : “Do you still remember our bible story children?”  
*Children* : “Yes, ms.”  
*Melodie* : “about Zaccheus”  
*Teacher* : “Ok. What happened to Zaccheus?”  
*Brigita* : “He is short and he climb the tree to see Jesus.”  
*Charly* : “He has no friend.”  
*Teacher* : “Then what Jesus said to Zaccheus?”  
*Bezaleel* : “Come down.”  
*Melodie* : “Zaccheus come down. I want to stay in your house. Then they go to Zaccheus house.”

Based on the phenomenon above, we can see that whether boys and girls in kindergarten have capability in acquiring different kinds of sentences of English language. We can see also that girls (Melodie and Brigita) used a good verbal fluency in explaining something while boys (Charly and Bezaleel) tend to simplify and comprehend their understanding.

This research wants to find out the types of English sentences acquiring by kindergarten students. This research also wants to find out the dominant types of sentences that boys and girls used in their interactions; will girls tend to produce more utterances than boys according to the theories above.

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

Based on the background above, the problems are formulated as the following:

1. What types of English sentences are acquired by young learners based on gender perspective?
2. How do male and female learners acquire those types of English sentences?
3. Why do males and females of young learners acquire the English sentences in the way they do?

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

In line with the problems, the objectives of the study are:

1. to find out the types of English sentences acquired by the kindergarten students based on gender perspective,
2. to investigate how male and female learners acquired those types of English sentences, and
3. to reason for male and female English sentence acquisition in the way they do.

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

The study of children language acquisition is a broad area to be studied because so many aspects to be discovered. In this study, the writer only focuses on the English sentences acquisition by the kindergarten learners based on gender perspective. The types of English sentences analyzed are limited on declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentence.

### 1.5 The Significances of the Study

The valuable input can enrich the study on the development of language analysis especially in English language acquisition. The findings of the study are expected to contribute significantly to different parts theoretically and practically.

Theoretically, these finding will be helpful for;

1. To add teacher's knowledge in the process of English language acquisition as guidelines for them in the process of introducing English to the students.
2. To enrich knowledge and notice toward children's language development.

Practically, these findings will be helpful for;

1. To enable the teachers to improve students' capability in acquiring English language based on their gender.
2. To help the other researchers who are interested in gaining some knowledge about English sentence acquisition by kindergarten learners or children.