

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background of the Study

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 beings made some experts in language process curious to explore the phenomenon. The language acquisition in human infants have always been a fascinating subject through the ages. During the infants or very early childhood period, children learn to express things by using speech sounds. Whenever they feel hungry, thirsty, or hurt, they produce speech sounds such as crying, which is also a part of the process of communication, where the infants start to use their articulatory to communicate with other people, because they are still not able to say perfectly what they want like the adults do.

Language is a uniquely human gift of evolution. It is subtle, abstract, and cultural phenomenon that no doubt come in the human biological system at a relatively later date.

Students interested in these child developments traditionally have been interested in language development for two reasons, first the study of the acquisition of language potentially can tell a great deal about the physiological and intellectual functioning of the children as they mature and second the use of language can be also

considered to have a tremendous effect on the children's relationship with themselves and their environments. Despite this interest, and many years of research, not a great deal was known about what the children learned when they learned a language.

A linguistic description of the structure of language has caused a new upurge of interest in the study of language acquisition because it promises to shed much further light of the understanding of the children's acquisition and use of language and its relation to other aspects of their development. This linguistic description has been termed transformational or generative grammar, and its goal is to account for all the generalizations about language of which the native adult speaker has the knowledge, such as (1) what is a sentence and what are the functional relationships expressed in sentences, (2) what is a word and how is it used in certain contexts, and (3) what is a speech sound and how is it used in certain contexts. This knowledge is presumably what the native speaker uses to derive the meaning of an utterance and to express intended meaning. It is a fact that language acquisition is a crucial process in the attempt of understanding language development more deeply. Krashen (1985 : 1) asserts that acquisition refers to the subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language.

Human beings are born to speak. They have an innate gift for figuring out the rules of the language used in their environment. The environment itself is also a significant factor. Environment influences the children in the conversation very much. This is an achievement children get without the realizations of adults are

surprised to encounter this kind of psychological and linguistic phenomenon. A study conducted by de Boysson (1999 : 5) states that about two years after conception or a year after birth, children will say their first words. The skill and the swiftness with which children learn to speak have always fascinated adults. Infants need other people especially their caretakers to motivate them to communicate namely through crying, cooing, uttering sound or meaningful words, which will help them to be able to carry conversation and to communicate their needs and wants with other people in the community. Dardjowidjojo (2000 : 49) explains that the adjustment in the caretakers' speech register served two functions namely to facilitate understanding and to get the child to be involved in the conversation. Talking about the caretakers' speech register, it is better to know that there are eight parts of speech in English in the traditional grammar. They are noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction and interjection. So, it is very interesting to discover which parts of speech that children acquire.

Clark (2003 : 12) mentions that first language acquisition requires a comprehensive look at where and when children acquire a first language. It integrates social and cognitive approaches on how children analyze, understand, and produce sounds, words, and sentences, as they learn to use language to cooperate and achieve goals.

The function of language can be observed from different points of views, namely, from a biological viewpoint, language can be interpreted as having evolved as a behavioral capacity because it is biologically adaptive, useful in promoting the

survival of human as a species and psychologically, language can be viewed, at least in part, as a behavior that indirectly serves the biological, social, or aesthetic needs of the individual.

Acquiring a language is a skill that children begin to develop with the first sounds they make as babies. For most children, their first words are made up of simple sounds such as *mama*, *Dada* or *bye-bye*. As early as the first and second years, children's speech exhibits a variety of complex ideas (Clark, 2003 : 65 – 67), for example, children say such things as *big truck* semantically, the object truck is assigned the attribute big, *Daddy's chair*, and the object Daddy possesses another object chair, and *mommy give*, the object Mommy is the cause of an action giving. This development of oral language is one of children's most natural and impressive accomplishments and as with other aspects of development, language acquisition is not predictable. One child may say the words at 10 months, another at 20 months.

In the process of studying a child's language acquisition, one of the requirements is to understand the child's family background. If that is to be understood, perhaps some, if not all, the problems can be solved. It is an important fact to be studied so that the development can be well understood and will contribute a great deal in the process of a child's mental development. In the study of a child's language development, there are of course many problems to be solved and a study should be conducted. There are many questions to be answered. The answers will

increase the scientific and academic values in the process of being able to understand the child's language development which can be said to be complicated.

Actually, there have been some studies conducted by the postgraduate students from the State University of Medan related to the linguistic knowledge about what the children acquire over the developmental period at various stages, but the researcher wants to conduct a the study on how and what words are acquired by children of 22 months old as their early words. Some of the previous findings are used as a lead and a comparative for her samples to a better understanding of doing her research.

Due to the above facts as have been discussed, the researcher is very curious to study on how and what words are acquired by the 22-month-old children as their word utterances.

It is an attempt to analyze the process of development of the language acquisition of the 22-month-old children. The researcher tries to focus her research on the acquisition of early words by a male and a female of 22 months old.

1.2 The Problems of the Study

In relation to the background mentioned previously, the problems are formulated as follows:

1. How many words can the children acquire at the age of 22 months old?
2. What kinds of words do they acquire?
3. Can they pronounce such words correctly?
4. What phonological segments are produced during the three months of the observations?
5. Are there any differences between the vocabularies acquired by the female and the male children?

These questions will be answered through the analysis of the data, which will be obtained in the research.

1.3 The Objectives of the Study

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In view of the above problems, the main objectives of this study are:

1. To find out how many words acquired by the 22-month-old children.
2. To find out what kinds of words acquired by the 22-month-old children.
3. To find out whether the 22-month-old children can pronounce such words correctly.
4. To find out the phonological segments which are produced during the three months of the observations.
5. To find out the differences between the vocabularies acquired by the female and the male children.

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1.4 The Significance of the Study

The results of this study are expected to give answers to some of the problems faced in the process of language acquisition of the 22-month-old children, in the aspects of early words acquired by 22-month-old children. It is hoped that the findings of this study will be significantly relevant to the theoretical and practical aspects.

Theoretically, the research findings can provide a basis for a further research on the different stages on children's language acquisition. The findings of this study are expected to be useful as a valuable a much in-depth for the modification of an analysis on children's utterances, and especially in their early words acquisition.

Practically, on the other hand, this research can provide useful guidelines for teachers and adults in the process of introducing English to young children as related to the theory of language acquisition.

In particular, this thesis is presented to the State University of Medan and the students where the writer teaches. The results of the findings can enrich their resources on Language Acquisition of Indonesian children and parents may benefit this study as a reference in assisting/facilitating their children language acquisition. While for the future researchers, this research will be useful for them as guidance for other in-depth studies.

1.5 The Scope of the Study

In conducting this study, the researcher limits her observation only on the children's language development and the interactions between the caretakers namely the parents, brothers, sisters and environment with the children. The researcher is concerned only on utterances produced by the 22-month-old children, particularly sounds, words and meaning. Therefore, the study is limited to the utterances that the infants make as the acquisition of their early words. The infants being observed were a male and a female who spoke Indonesian. These observations were conducted for three months, starting in October 1st 2006 until December 31st 2006. They were at the stage of 22 months old at the beginning of the observations, and by the end of the research, they were 2 years old.

1.6 The Arrangement of Chapters

The contents of this study consist of five chapters. Chapter I is Introduction. Chapter II deals with Review of Related Literature which consists of the Theories of Language Acquisition, the Stages of Language Development, the Words, the Children Determine the Meaning of Words, the Phonological Acquisition and the Sex Differences. Chapter III deals with the Research Design, the Subjects, the Instrument for Collecting the Data, the Technique of Collecting the Data and the Technique of Analyzing the Data. Chapter IV is devoted to the discussion of language acquisition of words by the 22 month old children. The last chapter, Chapter V deals with the Conclusions and the Suggestions.