

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 The Background of the Study

The acquisition of a first language is a complex topic that requires an interdisciplinary approach. It has been traditionally studied within the field of psycholinguistics, but contributions from other disciplines such as biology, education or the social sciences are necessary to gain a wider perspective.

Language acquisition serves as one of the central topics in cognitive science. Every theory of cognition has tried to explain it; probably no other topic has aroused such controversy. Possessing a language is the quintessence of human trait: all normal human speak, no nonhuman animal does. Language is arguably the most important components of culture because much of the rest of it is normally transmitted orally. It is impossible to understand the subtle nuances and deep meanings of another culture without speaking its language. Language then is the main vehicle by which we know about other people's thoughts, and the two must be intimately related.

Every time we speak we are revealing something about language. So the facts of language structure are easy to come by; these data hint at a system of extraordinary complexity. Nonetheless, learning a first language is something every normal child does successfully, in a matter of a few years and without the need for formal lessons. With language so close to the core of what it means to be human, it is not surprising that children's acquisition of language has received

so much attention. Anyone with strong views about the human mind would like to show that children's first few steps are steps in the right direction.

When children develop such skill is always a difficult question to answer. 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). For example, children say such things as „big truck“ (semantically, the object „truck“ is assigned the attribute „big“) „Daddy chair“ (the object „Daddy“ possesses another object „chair“), and „Mommy give“ ( the object „Mommy“ is the cause of an action of „giving“). Next they begin to use complex sentences, to produce longer words that require more fine motor control by the age of 4 to 4 ½ years. Gradually children begin to use their speech skills, or sounds, to form language that refers to the use of words and sentences to convey ideas. By the time they start kindergarten, children know most of the fundamental of their language. They have speech that is easily understood by an unfamiliar listener so that they are able to converse easily with someone who speaks as they do (that is, in their dialect). This development of oral language is one of children's most natural and impressive accomplishments and as with others aspects of development, language acquisition is not predictable. One child may say her first word at 10 months, another at 20 months. One child may use complex sentences at 5 ½ years, another at 3 years.

Since language itself does not provide the child with such ideas as object, attribute, possesses, cause and action the question arises as to how the child

acquired them. Obviously, interaction with the world is necessary. But, were the basic ideas already in the mind in some form even before

The physical stimuli of the world were sensed, i.e. the innate ideas view of the relation lists? Or, were the ideas derived entirely through experience with none being in the mind (latent or otherwise) prior to experiencing of the world, i.e. the experiential view of the Empiricists? As far as language acquisition data are concerned, presumably none will serve to settle any of these controversies. Both the Rationalist and Empiricist theories are sufficiently vague so that any observational datum can be given an explanation. Aside from such ultimate, there still a great deal that can be discovered about how human beings acquire language.

The rules of their language are learned at an early age through use, and over time, without formal instruction. Thus one source for learning must be genetic. 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. Children learn the specific variety of language (dialect) that the important people around them speak.

It is acknowledged that children work through linguistic rules on their own not merely through imitating those around them because young children tend to use forms that adults never use, such examples are best seen through the sentences uttered by English-speaking children like “ I goed there before” or “I see your feets” (Genishi, 1988:16-23). These problems of grammar first appear when children begin to produce multi-word utterances as some researchers have

assumed that children do not start to work on inflectional morphology or on grammatical morphemes more generally until after they have begun to combine two or more words (Brown, 1973 in Clark, 2003: 191). Being capable of producing such utterances, children, in English and many other languages, set out to alter single words in order to indicate number (the –s ending in English) and tense (-ed in English), or other inflections of meaning. Just as in word learning, children frequently make errors of overgeneralization. For instance when-speaking children learn that the –ed ending indicates past tense, they tend to use it for all verbs, including those that are irregular and do not take the –ed ending in adult speech (such as “go” or “think”). This is excellent evidence that children are learning the systems of their language: they are producing words according to the basic rules of the language, rather than by simple imitation of the language they hear. Only after extensive practice with both the rule and its exceptions does the child learn to speak as an adult. Children eventually learn the conventional past tense forms for irregular verbs and irregular plural forms like, “went” and “feet”, as they sort out for themselves the exceptions to the rules of English syntax. As with learning to walk, learning o talk requires time for development and practice in everyday situations. Constant correction of a child’s speech is usually unproductive.

Moreover, children seem to be born not just to speak, but also to interact socially. Even before they use words, they use cries and gestures to convey meaning; they often understand the meanings that others convey. The point of learning language and interacting socially is not to master rules, but to make

connections with other people and to make sense of experiences for language occur through an interaction among genes (which hold innate tendencies to communicate and be sociable), environment, and the child's own thinking abilities.

Given the above views on language acquisition, each must account for some facts about child language development. First, children learn language rapidly. In only a few years, children progress from virtually no language comprehension or production to almost adult capacity. Second, across language, some systematic regularities exist in what children learn both early and late. As well as some differences that require explanation.

Sometime during their second year, after children have about 50 of these early words of English in their vocabularies, they begin to put those words together into rudimentary two-word sentences (Brown, 1973 in Gleason and Ratner, 1993:366). Words that they said in the one-word stage are now combined into short utterances. In English such utterances lack articles, prepositions, inflections, or any of the other grammatical modifications that well-formed adult language requires.

An examination of children's two-word utterances in many different language communities has suggested that everywhere in the world children at this age are expressing the same kinds of thoughts and intentions in the same kinds of utterances (Brown, 1973 in Gleason and Ratner, 1993:366). At this stage, children acquiring English express basic meanings, but they lack the grammatical forms of the language that indicate number, gender, and tense. These sentences are limited

in meaning and are produced without function words or inflections. In spite of that, these two-word utterances do include some kind of grammatical information. The phrase „hit Andy” means something different to a child than “Andy hit”. Children appear to be able to produce this kind of difference as soon as they begin to produce multi-word utterances, and they comprehend it even earlier. This brings up an important point in language acquisition and other parts of developmental psychology: an inability to produce a certain behavior does not mean that the corresponding cognitive structures are absent. Children are able to understand grammatically complex sentences and words long before they are able to produce them.

It must be noted too that language acquisition is marked by individual variation as well as generalized developmental trends. Thus, some children seem to appreciate the adult language patterns before being able to produce aspects of the grammar; such children may use adult-like prosody and “dummy syllables” to fill in between those vocabulary items they are capable of producing, saying, [wan a kuki] for “ I want the cookie”. Children with a more analytic style appear comfortable producing “ Want cookie”, until they can incorporate the additional grammatical elements into their output. Similarly, even when children use only single words to communicate, stylistic variation in the kinds of words most frequently used by children can be seen. Some children appear to build their initial lexicons by incorporating many names for objects; other children may include proportionately more verb or “social” items such as hi, bye, please, and so forth (Bates, Dale, and Thal, 1995; Nelson, 1973 in Gleason and Ratner, 1993:367).

Most people acquire their own language without fully realizing how it is taking place. Young children need to use language to make sense of the world they live in. They gradually learn to understand and use rules of the language spoken in their society. Their language-using abilities are formed by the maturation of the infant's brain which is tied very much to their biological and cognitive development and interplay with many social factors in their environment.

In general, all normal children, regardless of their culture, develop language at roughly the same time along with the same schedules of biological and cognitive development. It has been already noted that a child who does not hear, or is not allowed to use language, will learn no language. The child must be physically capable of sending and receiving sound signals in a language. In order to speak a language, a child must be able to hear the language being used.

There are two views which explain how children manage to acquire the adult language. First, they are empiricists, who propose that language is learned as a result of experience. This view then is observed through its two theories, the „imitation“ and „reinforcement“ theory. The first thinks that children merely imitate what they hear. And the second suggests that a child learns to produce the correct words or sentences because he is positively reinforced when he says something right and negatively reinforced when he says something wrong. The other view comes from nativists who propose that language acquisition is the result of innate capacities to language and is only found in human beings.



Before he produces those spoken words, a child in his life utters very limited and simple utterances based on the things he sees, feels, and hears which are usually relied on all the kinds of nonlinguistic-cue-direction of gaze, gestures, and the context itself. He firstly starts producing babbling sounds which have no linguistic significance. Then sometimes after one year the child begins to use single unit utterances to mean everyday objects he sees. As the child has been able to put two words together to form one sentence, he now starts producing multiple word utterances.

Based on the description above, the writer found some interesting things in this study. The appearance of baby's first words can be said to depend on some factors such as culture, social environment, family background, etc. the baby usually needs a stimulus in order to give a response, just like what behaviorists believes. Thus it is very possible that the development of language of a child is different from one another. A child may be able to produce words in earlier age than another. Based on the writer's view children at the same age have significant differences of development in acquiring syntax. Secondly, the writer is interested in studying what kinds of syntax that a child of twenty until forty eight months acquired.

Because this research is a case study of a child of 20-48 months therefore, the research problem is specifically on the subjects.



## **1.2 The Research Problems**

The main problems that will be discussed in this research are:

1. What syntactic category do the children acquire from the age of 20 up 48 months old?
2. How is the development of the syntax of the children with 20-48 months old?

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

This study is devoted to analyze the development of syntactical acquisition of 20- 48 months child and to identify and describe the syntax words the subject acquired at the age 20-48 months.

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

This study is limited only on the development of a 20-48 months child's syntactical acquisition in Indonesian Language that he acquires in speaking ability.

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

It is expected that the findings of this study will be significantly relevant to the theoretical and practical aspects. Theoretically, the research findings hopefully can provide significant contribution for a further research on language acquisition in Indonesian Language of different stages. Practically, on the other hand, this research hopefully can provide valuable information for parents who are interested in their children's acquiring the language.