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# FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: LEARNING OR SPONTANT

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## **Abstract**

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*Language acquisition is a measurement of children to bring their mother language. It is achieved from both spontan and learning when the children in development phase. The language where the children live is called mother language which is obtained by practice it gradually. The process of acquiring language is a storyline that always passed by a newborn child so that they can understand the meaning of words and sentences and also they understand how to use them in communication. Mastering the language of a child process of the first language acquisition often called mother tongue. It is a language where when firs of all children know how the language used in the neighborhood is not the language of the mother. Shortly, Acquisition is a process of language understanding by the child both nature and nurture when they first learn the first language. Both contribute to the acquisition and development of the child's language and both are interconnected. The conscious process in the acquisition of language and language use are all described in the interdisciplinary science of psycholinguistics.*

**Keywords:** *Psycholinguistics, First Language acquisition, Learning or spontan*

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## **Introduction**

Language is a symbol or a tool to convey ideas by the speaker to the person speaking. Similarity with children who are still not familiar with the text or context of language that is like adult in communication. Each child will follow the language they first heard and they will use the language as a means of communication, the event is called the first language processing by the child. Language acquisition is the process that takes place in the brain of a child when acquiring his mother tongue. Many language acquisition theories say that a child has a great ability to absorb, produce and apply words in understanding and communication. The language acquisition theory usually refers to the acquisition of the first language (B1) not the second language (B2), where at first the child will speak in his native language (read first language).<sup>1</sup> As the child progresses and the wider range of social interactions and new environments, he will learn and acquire the second language as an additional language. The study is also examined by Masykur with the title “an analysis of first language acquisition in children”. The result of his study showed that from the participant of children with 24-36 month age claimed that the process of language acquisition depends on an innate language ability which hold that at least some linguistic knowledge exists in human at birth, and also the input that learners achieve plays a very important role in

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<sup>1</sup> Enjang Burhanudin Yusuf. *Perkembangan dan Pemerolehan Bahasa Anak*. Journal. Yin Yang. Vol. 11, No. 1201

language acquisition since the input activates this innate structure.<sup>2</sup> According to Meniado, based on the finding of his study concluded that the subject (Lebanese child) acquired his first language (arabic) largely biologically (nature). It confirmed that he has a well-functioning language Acquisition Device (LAD).<sup>3</sup>

### **Definition of Language Acquisition**

Some opinions address the acquisition of the language of the child which will be the longer the argument because all opinions are in line with the facts taking place in the first language procurement process of the child. One definition says that acquiring a language has a sudden, sudden start and another says that language is the result of natural interaction. The stability of the child's language strats around one-year-old child's armpit begins using verbal words or separate words from linguistic passwords to achieve their social goals. Stork and Widdowson in Massoud state that acquisition of language and language acquisition is a process of achieving children's skills and skills in their mother tongue, where children will acquire their first language because of their potential in them and their strong

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<sup>2</sup> Masykur. An analysis of first language acquisition in children. Journal. WEJ, vol 1. No 1 september 2017. [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu)

<sup>3</sup> Joel.C. Meniado. Firsrt language acquisition: A case study of three year old Lebanese child. Journal of child language acquisition and development- JCLAD. Vol: 4 issue: 3 98-112,2016, September. [www.researchgate.net](http://www.researchgate.net)

influence from the surrounding environment.<sup>4</sup> Other notions say that language acquisition has a gradual start arising from pre-linguistic cognitive achievements.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, Dardjowidjodjo defines the acquisition of language as a process of language mastery performed by the child naturally when he learns his mother's language.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to that, Kiparsky and Tarigan say that language acquisition is a process used by children to adapt a series of hypotheses with parental expressions in order to choose the best and simplest grammar rules of the language concerned.<sup>7</sup> From some of the above understandings it can be assumed that in acquiring the language that it occurs naturally without the presence of a formal or formal institution where the child will be given the first language therapy experienced by the child in question.

## **Theories of language acquisition**

### **a. Theory of Behaviorism**

Behaviorist figures argue that all humans have basic mastery of language. From the habit of interacting with the

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<sup>4</sup> Massoud Rahimpour: *Developmental Stage of Child Language* . Journal of Faculty of Letters and Humanities Year 47, No. 190. P.58-59

<sup>5</sup> John Lyons. *Language and Linguistics, an introduction*. UK: Cambridge University Press. 1981

<sup>6</sup> Soedjono Dardjowidjodjo. *Psikolinguistik: Pengantar Pemahaman Bahasa Manusia*. Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, Ety. 2003

<sup>7</sup> Tarigan. Henry Guntur. *Psikolinguistik*. Bandung: Angkasa, 1985

environment, one can learn techniques of mastering language or forming language skills. Biological devices that determine children can get their language skills there are three, namely the brain (central nervous system), hearing devices and utensils where in the process of talking, the nervous system in the brain is the controller. All language response codes that have been processed in the brain will then be sent to motorized channels such as spoken devices, to produce physical language.<sup>8</sup> The behaviorism theory emphasizes linguistic behavior that can be seen in a tangible relationship between stimulus (stimulus) and reaction (response). Effective language behavior is to make the right reaction to stimuli. This reaction will become a habit if the reaction is justified. Thus, children learn their first language. B.F. Skinner is a behaviorism figure who wrote the book *Verbal Behavior* (1975) which was used as a guide for followers of this school. According to this flow, learning is the result of external factors imposed on an organism.<sup>9</sup> According to Skinner, linguistic behavior is similar to other behaviors, controlled by the consequences. If an enjoyable effort the behavior will continue to be done. Conversely, if it is not profitable, the behavior will be abandoned.

### **b. Theory of Nativism**

Chomsky is a nativism who declare that language can only be mastered by human, animals cannot possibly master

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<sup>8</sup> Taringan., *Psikolinguistik*, .... 1985

<sup>9</sup> Simanjuntak, Mangantar., *Pengantar Psikolinguistik Moden*. Kuala Lumpur. 1987

human language. Chomsky's statement is based on several assumption that stated by Shafa<sup>10</sup> (1) language behavior is something inherited (genetic), each language has the same pattern of development (something universal), and the environment has a small role in the process of language maturation, (2) language can be mastered in a relatively short time, (3) children's language environment cannot provide sufficient data for the mastery of complex grammar from adults.

The nativism group believes that every human being born has been provided with a tool to obtain language, namely language acquisition device (LAD). Without LAD, a child may not be able to master the language in a short time and can master a complex language system. LAD also allows a child to be able to distinguish a sound of language and not a sound of language. Nativism argues that during the process of acquiring the first language, children (human) in a step open their lingual abilities genetically programmed. This view does not consider the environment to have an influence in acquiring language, but consider that language is biological gift. Nativism claims that language is too complex and complicated, so it is impossible to learn in a short time through methods such as imitation. So there must have been some important aspect about the language system that already exists in human naturally.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Shafa. Teori pemerolehan bahasa dan implikasinya dalam pembelajaran. *Jurnal dinamika ilmu*, IAIN Samarinda, vol 12. No 2, desember 2012:04

<sup>11</sup> Darjowijoyo, *Psikolinguisti*. . . . . 2003:234





### **c. Theory of Cognitivist**

Piaget and Vigotsky are the originator of cognitivist theory which assumes that language is not a separated natural feature, but one of several abilities derived from cognitive maturity. Language is structure by reason and its development must be based on changes that are more basic and more general in cognition, so the sequences of cognitive development determine the sequences of language.<sup>12</sup> This is of course different from Chomsky's opinion which states that the general mechanism of cognitive development cannot explain complex, abstract and distinctive language structures, likewise with the language of environment. Language must be obtained naturally. According to the theory of cognitivist, the most important thing to be achieved is cognitive development, then knowledge can come out in the form of language skills. From birth to 18 months, the language is considered as not yet available. Children only understand the world through their senses. Children only know objects that are seen directly. At the end of one year, children can understand that objects have a permanent nature so that children begin to use symbols to present objects that are not present in front of them. This symbol then develops into the initial words spoken by the child.

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<sup>12</sup> Abdul chaer. Psikologistik... 2003:223, pateda Lamsike. Tinjauan psikologis pemerolehan bahasa dan kemampuan bernalar pada anak. Jurnal al-lisan IAIN Gorontalo volume 1 no 1 june 2015:49



#### **d. Theory of Interactionism**

The interactionism theory assumes that language acquisition is the result of the interaction between learning mental abilities and the language environment. Language acquisition is related between ‘input’ and the internal abilities possessed by learning. Every child has LAD since birth that equipped with intelligent. One of intelligent of question is language intelligence.<sup>13</sup> However, it cannot be forgotten is the environment that influence the child’s language skill. According to the theory, language acquisition is the result of interaction between students’ psychological abilities and the language environment. Language acquired by students is closely related to the students’ internal abilities and input from their environment. This theory also reinforced by the opinion of Howard Gardner who said that since birth, children have had multiple intelligences one of which is language intelligence.<sup>14</sup>

#### **e. Theory of functional**

Functional theories conduct a research revolution in learning and language acquisition, where they examine that language is the result of manifestation of cognitive and affective abilities that benefit human themselves, human and surrounding environment to connect with them or in order to explore the

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<sup>13</sup> Patedaa Lamsike. *Tinjauan psikologis...* 2015: 51

<sup>14</sup> Taringan, Henry Guntur. *Psikolinguistik*. Bandung: Angkas. 1985:134.

world.<sup>15</sup> this theory is also to clarify the theory of nativism which is still general, abstract, explicit, and logical. Functional theory emphasizes language on its communicative function. Bloom, Piaget, and Slobin's research provides a new perspective on children's language studies where they focus on cognitive development with the acquisition of first language. Piaget argues that development is the result of the close relationship between children and their environment coupled with complementary interactions between the development of perceptual cognitive capacity and children's language experience.<sup>16</sup> Children's learning ability is largely determined by the degree to which they know the world around and the ability to interpret conceptually in making the world category around. Children's language skills are very dependent on children's cognitive factors, what children know will be a determinant of verbal language skills and understanding the message. Therefore, linguists begin to overcome the structure of the language function rules and the relationship between the language and the function.

### **The process of acquiring language**

Language acquisition or language acquisition is a process that takes place in a child's brain when he acquires his first language or his native language. Language acquisition is usually

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<sup>15</sup> Harras kholid A dan Andika duta Bachari. Dasar-dasar psikolinguistik. 2009:99

<sup>16</sup> Pateda Lamsike. Tinjauan psikologis.....2015:15

distinguished from language learning. Language learning is related to processes that occur when a child learns a second language after he has acquired his first language. So, language acquisition is related to the first language, while language learning is in the second language.<sup>17</sup>

During the acquisition of the first language, Chomsky mentions that two processes occur in the first language acquisition of children phase. Those are process of competence and performance process. These two process are different happen to the children. Competence is the unconscious process of grammar mastery (phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics). It naturally occurs since the children born. Even though being born from birth, competence requires guidance so that children have performance in language. In other side, performance is the ability of children to use language in communication. Performance consists of two process, namely the process of understanding and the process of publishing sentences. The process of understanding involve the ability to observe of perceive heard sentences, while the publishing process involve the ability to produce sentences themselves.<sup>18</sup> Bellow examined the process of language acquisition of children.

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<sup>17</sup> Abdul chaer. *Psikolinguistik: kajian teoritik*. Jakarta: rineka cipta. 2003:167

<sup>18</sup> Abdul chaer. *Psikolinguistik...* 2003:168

**a. Acquisition in the phonology**

When the children are born, they only have 20% of adult brain, which limits newborn from doing many things that they can only cry and move their bodies. It is different from adult that can do everything based on mood they want to do.<sup>19</sup>

**b. Acquisition in the field of syntax**

When the child has begun to be able to say one word, that's where the acquisition of the language of the syntax begins to be detected. A word spoken by a child is a full sentence according to them, because they have not been able to say more than one word, they only take one word from the sentence, for example the word "mam" actually that the child will say is "I want to mamam". Of the three words in the sentence, the child chooses the word mam not me or want, in short, this word is said by the one word utterance that the child does not arbitrarily choose words to give new information.<sup>20</sup>

**c. Acquisition in the field of pragmatics**

In the acquisition of the language, children also must muster the language associated with the community called pragmatic which discusses the use of language in relation to other people. In Indonesia particular, speakers need to consider the language to be used against the other person. Because pragmatic

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<sup>19</sup> Darjowijoyo. *Psikolinguistik*, ... 2010:244

<sup>20</sup> Darjowijoyo. *Psikolinguistik*, ... 2010:244

is part of language behavior, research on language acquisition need to also observe how children develop pragmatic abilities.

## **Discussion**

### **Is language acquisition nurture or nature?**

There are two views on the acquisition of language (McGraw in Krisanjaya 1998). First language acquisition has a sudden or sudden start. Freedom of speech starts about a year when children use loose words or separate from symbols in linguistics to achieve their social goals. The second view suggests that language acquisition has a gradual start that emanates from the achievements of motorcycles, social and preliminary cognitive abilities. Linguists are still debating the issue of acquiring language in children where basically all children will acquire language or master the language as they grow in the community. The discussion is whether the acquisition is nurture or nature. According to the behaviorism flow that language acquisition is nurture where the language of every child born will be determined by the environment with the habitual habits that exist. As it is his empty plate that will fill itself with the environment.<sup>21</sup> Skinner is a behavioral pioneer who concludes that the acquisition of knowledge, including knowledge of language use is based on the existence of stimulus, the followed by the response. From this process of repetition will

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<sup>21</sup> Darjowijoyo. *Psikolinguistik*, ... 2010:244

appear the habit. Furthermore, Skinner asserted that language is a kind of habit that can be gained by exercising bully or continuously.

On the other hand, in 1959 Chomsky wrote a residence with the aim of protesting the theory of Skinner. He argues that the acquisition of language is not based on nurture but based on nature where there is a system that has been provided to each child that controls the ability to stand and walk. Children are not born like empty plates (*tabula rasa*) but they have been equipped with a tool called a language acquisition device which is universal. Thus all born children have been equipped with the same device in the acquisition of language. It can be concluded that the nature of every child will be able to acquire language as the age of language since the language acquisition of the child has been regulated by a system of language acquisition devices or language acquisition devices.<sup>22</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The first language acquisition is the first language acquisition process by the child. The first language is the language used in daily communication in the family or is called the mother tongue not the mother tongue. How exactly is this first language acquisition process? There are several theories of language acquisition that explain this, namely behaviorism

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<sup>22</sup> Darjowijoyo. *Psikolinguistik*, ... 2010:244



theory, nativism, cognitivist, interactionism. These four theories have different perspectives in explaining the way the children acquire their first language. One is the debate between nature and nurture. But both nurture and nature are needed in language acquisition. Nature is required because without the natural supply of the creature will not speak. While nurture is also needed because without the input and intervention of nature's natural supply it will not be realized. In short language acquisition need to learn from daily environment that it's related to the nurture, while nature is happened to the children's acquisition which in LAD means language is gotten spontaneously.

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