

FROM PERCEPTION TO PRODUCTION: AN ANALYSIS OF FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN 2.5 YEARS OLD TODDLER SPEECH

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Abstract

This research discusses the phenomenon of first language acquisition in a 2.5 years old toddler named Rumaysaa. The role of perception and production is the key to its process. In this study, variations in children's speech in producing the word 'pantai' (beach) became the main focus to find out how the perception and production processes influence each other in providing language knowledge to the research subjects. The research method used in this research is descriptive-analytical one with a qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because it can accommodate the uniqueness shown on the speech. Several previous studies regarding first language acquisition show that children can understand the meaning even though their speech is not perfect yet or may have a bubbling accent. The result of this research showed that Rumaysaa was able to imitate the word 'pantai' (beach) which was mentioned by her mother even though it took time to get a proper understanding of phonetic sounds. It actually has proven the previous theory that says a child's perception ability is much higher than the production ability. The imperfect speech that commonly appears for children with FLA is also found in Rumaysaa's speech. The conclusion from this research is that Rumaysaa has succeeded in perceiving the word 'pantai' and reproducing it through several repetitions and adjustments.

Keywords: *First Language Acquisition, Language, Comprehension, Cognitive Theory, Speech Sound.*

Introduction

Several linguists have delivered theories related to first language acquisition (conventionally abbreviated as FLA). Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist, was the first to come up with a cognitive theory related to the process of first language acquisition. One of his notable theory about FLA says that language is obtained based on knowledge gained from experience of interactions with the environment (Suparno, 2006: 106). On the other hand, the child's ability to understand what people are saying is much faster and much better than production process. Quoting the opinion of Fletcher and Garman (1981), Darjowidjojo explained that a child's ability to comprehend is five times better than the production capability (2005: 243). This imbalance between comprehension and production can be seen in children's daily behavior. A child will be able to understand

the command to do something, even if he or she can't pronounce a single word yet.

At the earlier stage of life, a child does not automatically have a regular grammar in his brain. The stage of acquiring the first language is related to the development of the child's language. This is because a person's first language is acquired when he was a child. There are four stages of language acquisition; acquisition of competence and performance stages, the semantic acquisition stage, the syntactic acquisition stage, and the phonological acquisition stage. Phonological acquisition stages are what will be discussed in detail through this study.

Research on language acquisition in children has been widely carried out. I managed to find three related studies from various languages. The first research was conducted by a Universitas Negeri Padang graduate student on a child who was one year old. The results showed that the

children were able to understand the meaning of many vocabulary even though the speech was not perfect.¹ The second study was conducted by graduate students from Oakland University on groups of children aged 1-3 years and 4-5 years. As a result, there are several points discovered. One of the result shows that speech in children aged 1-3 years tends to have a bubbling accent. In other words, the speech contains phonetics similar to the target vocabulary, but is simplified.² The third study was conducted on a group of children aged 1-3 years in the Balata resort area, Simalungun, North Sumatra. These studies turned out to come to the same conclusion, which is the occurrence of phonological disorders or inaccurate speech when producing language. However, speech errors do not indicate the inability in building comprehensive understanding. This is because the children who are the research subjects are actually able to recognize the exact meaning.³ From these three studies, the authors see that the production of speech in children who are learning the first language tends to be imperfect. What a child perceives is not the same as the sound that is produced by their articulators.

Although several previous researches had been conducted to search for another proof of the hypothesis about FLA, a case study is needed to look closer on how a process of perception and production emerged. Three previous researches above focus on classifying the produced utterances within the theory of FLA such as assimilation, omission, and substitution on letter of a word. But, the process from imperfect speech to a complete speech has not been highlighted. Therefore, with this data, a process of how a toddler try to adjust

her articulators could be observed. So, this research will be focusing on observing how the subject of the research perceive and apprehend, as well as reproduce the words that is spoken towards her. This research will give broader images of detail about what is happening with the child's mind and speech by analyzing the speech sound, as well as showing how a child can learn a word gradually through several processes.

Rumaysaa Hafsa Mahira, a 2.5 years old child (born 10 October 2017), is expressing her wish to her mother. The mother realizes that there is an imperfect speech from her child and tries to correct it. The data was taken from the Instagram account owned by Rumaysaa's mother, Retno Hening Palupi, with permission. It is the variations of the word 'pantai' (beach) that come out of the child's articulators that will be examined. From the explanation above, it is clearly seen that I want to take a deeper look by conducting a qualitative research on a child with FLA and looking for other findings that can strengthen, support, or complement the conclusions of previous research.

Methodology

I collected literatures in vary (both text and video) that can support research and processed the data based on the information obtained. In this study, a qualitative method was used to obtain the results of data processing. This method was chosen because of its characteristics that are more sensitive and open to adjustments with a lot of assertion to the value patterns that show up (Moleong, 2000). This method also helps in presenting directly the linguistic data obtained in the field according to its usage (Zaim, 2014). A qualitative approach is a research method based on the

¹ Suardi, dkk, "Pemerolehan Bahasa Pertama pada Anak Usia Dini", *Jurnal Obsesi: Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, Vol. 3 (1), p. 265 – 273, 2019.

² Debby Barrie, "Language Production and Language Perception: Development in Children Aged 1 to 5 Years Old", 2014. [Online]. Available

at <https://www.academia.edu/7792092/Language> [Cit. June 2nd 2020].

³ Bertaria Sohnata Hutaauruk, "Children First Language Acquisition At Age 1-3 years Old In Balata," *Journal of Humanities And Social Science*, Vol. 20 (8), p. 51-57, August 2015.

philosophy of postpositivism, used to examine the conditions of natural objects (Sugiyono, 2011: 9). This approach was chosen because it is able to accommodate the uniqueness and differences that may arise in the research results. This research was conducted by listening to the speech of the research subject from a recording. Referring to the research stages described by Miles and Huberman (2014), this research was conducted in three stages; 1) reduction (data transcribed, identified, classified), 2) presentation through tables, and 3) drawing the conclusions.

The psychological aspects that will be studied in this research is perception. Meanwhile, the linguistic aspect that I want to study is the phonological aspect of the

produced speech. Then, the data used by the writer for this research is a recording of the speech of a child having a conversation with his mother. The research will start by making transcript of the Rumaysaa's speech. After that, the variation of utterances by the word 'pantai' will be written down, marked, and presented on a table. Then, the phenomena that appears on the data will be classified based on the FLA theory and the production process would be observed. Lastly, the analysis would be conducted to draw a conclusion about Rumaysaa's FLA process.

Findings and Discussion

Table 1:

Variation of Rumaysaa's Reflective Utterances	The sound of utterances (written in phonetic transcription based on IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) Kiel 2015)	Frequency
Tapai	Tapar	2
Tampai	Tampar	4
Pandai	Pandar	1
Patai	Patar	2
Pantai	Pantar	1

* Video links are in the appendix.

From the observations above, it can be seen the various forms of speech from the word 'pantai' (means *beach*) have been produced by the research subjects (Rumaysaa). The sentence in the first spoken speech, '*mandi di tapai*', shows that she understands a certain concept related to an object, which refers to beach. This is an indication that a scheme has formed in the child's head regarding a place called

'pantai' (beach). Schemes are formed when repeated exposures are absorbed by children as listeners, so that certain concepts about what is perceived are embedded in children's cognition. Furthermore, the scheme can also undergo a development. Suparno (2006: 106), quoting a theory from Jean Piaget, explains that schemes are formed from an adaptation process which is divided into two; assimilation (adjustment to the existing knowledge) and

accommodation (formation of the new knowledge).

The evidence for the above speech is also in line with what was conveyed by Fletcher and Garman (1981). The ability of Rumaysaa in expressing her desire by saying '(*mau*) *main di tapai*' ((want to) play on the beach) shows that the comprehension skills of children works better than their production skills. The imbalance of comprehension and production explained by Fletcher and Garman shows up in Rumaysaa's speech. The repeated utterances of 'tapai' and 'tampai' at the beginning of the conversation also show that the child is actively perceiving what the mother has told her. This can be seen from Rumaysaa's repetition to find the appropriate word equivalents to what her mother says. Although the perception of sounds (phonetics) is imperfect, this does not diminish the child's comprehension of the concept of 'beach'.

Referring to the full transcription of the conversation, it can be recognized that the most dominant form of interaction related to language acquisition that occurs is imitation. The child repeatedly imitates what the mother says, although it is clearly heard that the imitation is not perfect yet. Rumaysaa succeeded once in pronouncing the word 'pantai' correctly, but the rest of her remarks showed that the sound production of the articulator did not match the sound her mother produces. The imperfect mention of the word 'beach', which occurs more frequently than perfectly produced speech, indicates that the child's articulator is developing.

On the other hand, Rumaysaa's mistake by repeatedly mentioning 'tapai' and 'tampai' in the first half of the video shows the occurrence of a prelexical process, where the individual cognitive attempts to recognize word units or parts, before the vocabulary is fully digested. Warren (2013: 102) who briefly describes the process of perception on his book, calls it a 'mapping from the input to the linguistic system'. According to him, the most

important thing from a perceptual process is what the listener gets from an input which is ultimately processed in a linguistic system. In the first stage, there must be a prelexical process when the individual cognitive tries to identify units or parts of a vocabulary before it is completely perceived. Rumaysaa tries to find the right sound in each syllable and checks it over and over. This shows the occurrence of input processing in the linguistic system.

This phenomenon is corresponding with what linguist Eva V. Clark (2000) said about language production of children. She stated that the imperfections in the pronunciation of certain sounds appears consistently when children learning their first language. Once, Rumaysaa says the word 'pantai' with a physical sound of 'pandai'. What was happened is the substitution process that being indicated the replacement of the existing consonants with other consonants. The nasal sound 'n' which is adjacent to the explosive sound 't' is difficult to pronounce so that the consonant 't' is replaced with 'd'. Furthermore, in the word 'tampai', there is a substitution (replacement) of three consonants at once. The consonant / p / changes to / t /, / n / becomes / m /, and / t / becomes / p /. The omission process can also be found in the Rumaysaa's utterances. In the utterance 'patai', the consonant / n / positioned in the middle is removed. Furthermore, on the word 'tapai', there is a substitution and an omission at the same time. The consonant / p / which is in front is replaced by / t / and the consonant / t / in the middle is replaced by / p /, while the consonant / n / which is in the middle is also missing. Replacement and elimination of repeated 'n' consonants can be caused by the characteristics of the 'n' sound that is not a basic human sound.

Phonological acquisition is one of the stages of language acquisition. This stage begins with the acquisition of basic sounds. According to Jacobson (in Suardi et al, 2019: 271), the basic sounds in human speech are / p /, / a /, / i /, / u /, / t /, / c /, / m /, and so on. Entering the age of one year,

children will begin to combine basic sounds and form syllables. After that, children will be more proficient in producing sounds. Besides, Clark explains that until children can use their articulators completely to speak the words perfectly, the appearance of imperfect forms of speech is considered very common. They may reduce the components of a sound or replace certain sounds with other forms. Imperfections in the pronunciation of certain sounds are something that consistently occurs when children try to produce language. Substitution (replacing certain consonants with other consonants), assimilation (fusing words into simpler to forms), and omission (removing consonants) are some examples that can be found (2000: 106 - 108).

She also explained that representations of production are usually different from what is understood by the children. To be able to produce a word, one must recall not only the relevant word for the idea conveyed, but also the relevant specification of articulation to produce a recognizable sequence of sounds. In order to produce recognizable words, children must find correspondences between articulation, adjustments to the vocal tract, and the specific auditory patterns that is produced. Creating the correct sequence of sounds takes time. Generating multilingual words and expressions requires children to check their language productions repeatedly, adapt their language production to representations in their own understanding, and try again whenever they detect a mismatch between the two (2000: 118).

The speech phenomenon experienced by Rumaysaa has proven Clark's opinion regarding first language acquisition among children. First, children do need time to recall memories that are relevant to the idea they want to convey. The child must determine the relevant articulation specifications to produce a recognizable sound sequence. Rumaysaa needed to try several times before finding the exact pronunciation of that word. But

overall, the process of perception and production of Rumaysaa's speaking trial can be considered as successful. Not necessarily able to imitate perfectly at once, but instead she creates a variety of less than perfect sounds. This phenomenon are just common and part of the process. Speech variations on the word 'pantai' also indicate that the child is making adjustments by completing the articulations, adjust the vocal tracts, and perceiving by the sense of hearing.

Conclusion

After observing Rumaysaa's utterances, I made several conclusions. First, the results of this study are relatively the same as the results of previous studies. The results of Rumaysaa's speech did not exactly match the input that was spoken by her mother, but she can understand the meaning. Nevertheless, this phase shows that the perception ability works well as the result (spoken words) sounds similar with the input (pantai). Second, children need time to be able to create the order of the sound (phonetic systems) from the words they learn. This is well proven when Rumaysaa has confusion in putting the order of the syllables of the word 'pantai'. She made it several times until successfully pronounce 'pantai'. Third, in the FLA process experienced by Rumaysaa, certain consonants were substituted and removed, which are common features of the speech of children learning their first language. However, there is one thing I would like to underline here. Rumaysaa once says the words 'tampai' over and over with certainty, so she was angry when his mother repeated the word in a questioning tone. This proves that the perceptual process sometimes also requires an iterative process. Although Rumaysaa had difficulty forming the correct phonetic sound, she was still able to understand the meaning of the word correctly and once successfully pronounce 'pantai' perfectly. This result shows the success of her in precepting and producing sounds. Overall, this research has

fully shown the complete process of how a child perceive and produce sounds in FLA stage.

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Appendix:

https://www.instagram.com/p/B_DQAA4BLbL/?igshid=gzmglk28rtwj