

## THE LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN BILINGUAL CHILDREN: A STUDY OF A 3-YEAR-OLD

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received May 07, 2024

Revised June 10, 2024

Accepted July 05, 2024

Available Online July 15, 2024

#### Kata Kunci:

Akuisisi Bahasa, Bilingual, Anak Usia Dini, Pengucapan, Kosa Kata

#### Keywords:

Language Acquisition, Bilingual, Early Childhood, Pronunciation, Vocabulary

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini meneliti akuisisi bahasa pada anak usia dini, dengan fokus pada Bebi, seorang anak berusia 3 tahun yang bilingual. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami proses akuisisi bahasa pada Bebi yang merupakan seorang anak bilingual dan bagaimana ia menggabungkan kosakata dari dua bahasa berbeda dalam komunikasi sehari-hari. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif, dengan pengumpulan data melalui observasi interaksi sehari-hari antara anak dengan lingkungannya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Bebi cenderung menyederhanakan kata-kata yang sulit diucapkan dan menggunakan pola pengucapan yang sudah dikenalnya. Anak juga menunjukkan pemahaman dasar tentang konsep dan objek sehari-hari. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa lingkungan bilingual dapat mempengaruhi perkembangan bahasa anak dengan cara yang unik, dan bahwa anak bilingual dapat menguasai kedua bahasa dengan baik jika mendapatkan paparan yang cukup.

### ABSTRACT

*This study examines language acquisition in early childhood, with a focus on Bebi, a 3-year-old bilingual child. The aim of this research is to understand the language acquisition process of Bebi, who is a bilingual child, and how he combines vocabulary from two different languages in everyday communication. The research method used is descriptive qualitative, with data collection through observation of daily interactions between children and their environment. The research results show that Bebi tends to simplify words that are difficult to pronounce and uses pronunciation patterns that are already familiar to her. Children also demonstrate a basic understanding of everyday concepts and objects. These findings suggest that bilingual environments can influence children's language development in unique ways, and that bilingual children can master both languages well if they get enough exposure.*

### INTRODUCTION

The term "acquisition" refers to the natural process by which a child learns their mother tongue, as described by (Dardjowidjojo, 2016). Unlike formal education, where structured lessons, teachers, and classrooms are utilized, language acquisition in early childhood occurs spontaneously and effortlessly. This process is inherently natural, driven by the child's interactions with their environment and the people around them. Children absorb language through daily communication with parents, siblings, and caregivers, without the need for explicit instruction or formal educational tools.

First language acquisition follows a series of developmental stages, each marked by specific milestones. Initially, infants engage in pre-linguistic communication through cooing and babbling, experimenting with sounds and intonation. As they grow, they begin to recognize and produce their first

words, usually by the end of their first year. This is followed by the rapid expansion of vocabulary and the formation of simple sentences around the age of two. By the age of three, children typically demonstrate significant linguistic abilities, including more complex sentence structures and a better grasp of grammar.

Human language skills can be enhanced in two ways: acquisition and learning. Acquisition is the process of obtaining a language without deliberate effort (unconsciously), usually unstructured, occurring in society, informal, driven by the need to communicate, and having social consequences (related to the community or neighborhood). This is different from learning. Learning is the process of acquiring a language intentionally, in a structured, formal manner, with competence as a key focus, taking place in a classroom, driven by educational demands, and knowledge acquisition (Ratnaningsih, 2017).

### **Bilingualism**

In Indonesia, bilingualism is not something new. The history of bilingualism in Indonesia can be traced back to the colonial period when the country was ruled by foreign governments. Bilingualism or multilingualism is common in Indonesia. Besides English, Japanese, and Dutch, Indonesian people also speak local languages such as Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, and many others. As a result, children born in Indonesian communities naturally tend to become bilinguals. Hamers & Blanc (in Apriana & Sutrisno (2022) define a bilingual community as a linguistic community where several individuals and two languages are in contact. This will enable the use of two languages simultaneously in the same interaction. Bilingualism can be understood from various perspectives, resulting in different classifications. Examining bilingualism based on proficiency in the first and second languages reveals two types: Balanced Bilinguals and Dominant Bilinguals. According to Butler and Hakuta (in Apriana & Sutrisno (2022), a child is considered a balanced bilingual if they possess equal proficiency in their first and second languages. Then, if one language is more proficiently spoken than the other, the individual is classified as a dominant bilingual. Werker (manual) believes that more than 50% of children population in the world are bilinguals and they get the exposure to both languages from birth. And Thordardottir (2015) added that his research shows that bilingual children can perform equally well as those monolingual children, as long as those bilingual children receive equal exposure to both languages.

### **Language Acquisition**

According to Chomsky (2009) language acquisition is a matter of growth and maturation of relatively fixed capacities, under appropriate external conditions. The way children acquire and use language is primarily influenced by internal factors. This is because all human languages share fundamental similarities, allowing children to learn any language. Child language acquisition occurs through speaking activities. Children's speaking ability develops over time, preceded by a period of listening skills and then progressing to speaking skills. Talking is closely related to the development of a child's vocabulary, which is acquired through listening and reading activities. (Tarigan, 2008)

Language acquisition refers to the processes that occur in a child's brain when they acquire language (Ginting et al., 2020). Language acquisition is a complex process that children experience until they master a second language (Rohimajaya & Hamer, 2020). Language acquisition in children aged 1-3 years occurs naturally, as they unconsciously absorb language but are able to use it for communication. The period before the age of 5 is known as the "golden age" of language development, during which children progress through various stages of language development.

### **Stages in Language Acquisition**

According to (Hidayani, 2021), language acquisition typically involves three mechanisms: imitation, conditioning, and social cognition, as follows:

1. Imitation: Children tend to imitate what they see and hear in their environment, with parents and surroundings playing crucial roles.
2. Conditioning: In this mechanism, children learn about their environment by associating sounds with objects or events. Initially, their vocabulary consists mainly of nouns.
3. Social Cognition: Social cognition is closely linked to imitation, as children acquire language through meaningful words or directions. At this stage, semantic cognition is already at work because they understand the person speaking and the context.

## METHODOLOGY

This research uses a descriptive qualitative research approach, which study is based on a real-life situation. The goal of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. This research is more concerned with what rather than how or why something has happened (Nassaji, 2015). According to (Creswell, 2007), qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the setting and encounters of the members to gain a deeper understanding of the miracle under consideration.

Qualitative research can be broadly defined as a kind of inquiry that is naturalistic and deals with non-numerical data. It seeks to understand and explore rather than to explain and manipulate variables (Nassaji, 2020). In addition, its adaptable nature permits analysts to adjust their strategies powerfully all through the examination preparation, in this manner empowering a more all encompassing and nuanced investigation of marvels.

The sample for this consider could be a single case, a 3-year-old child named Syahlaa Zarina Al-Anwar, nicknamed Bebi. The child's individual information incorporates:

### Children's Personal Data

- Name : Syahlaa Zarina Al-Anwar
- Nickname : Bebi
- Place & date of Birth : Tangerang, March 04th 2021
- Age : 3 Year 3 Months
- Address : Kp Sembung No. 156 RT 009 RW 006, Cikokol, Tangerang

Data collection included observing and documenting the child's dialect progress through daily intuition with siblings and parents. The data includes:

- Original Words (Words spoken by the child)
- Spoken Words of Sample (Children's spoken words, including vocabulary and sentence structure)

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### Language and Vocabulary Acquisition

Based on observational data collected from daily interactions between researchers and a 3-year-old bilingual child named Syahlaa Zarina Al-Anwar or Bebi, researchers found that Bebi uses a mixture of Indonesian and English vocabulary. This is because Bebi imitates what she sees and hears in her environment.

#### Spoken Word Observation

The table below presents a comparison between the original words and the words spoken by Bebi:

Original Word	Spoken Words of Sample
Makan	Mamam
Lama	Hama
Kucing	Milkuci
Nyamuk	Amuk
Buka	Uka

Gak Boleh	Nda Boye'
Angry/ marah	Ewi
Terimakasih	Asyi
Mie Instan	Minus
Halo	Hawo
Cemen	Hemen
Lihat	Yat
Monyet	Monye'
Sister	Sisi
Abang	Aba
Main	Mai'
Ikut	Iku
Sepeda	Peda
Garpu	Mpu
Mobil	Mbil
Perut	Peyut
Hair	Haiy
Tangan	Hangan
Baju	Haju
Rese	Wese
Cokeat	Cokwa
Milk	Mi'
Ice Cream	aisi
Sholat	Sowa
Topi	Hopi
I love you	Ahayu
Pergi	Pegi
Sepatu	Patu

Hiu	Iyu
Lagi apa	Giyapa
Kereta	Keta
Sendok	Cendok
Garpu	Gapu
Sikat Gigi	Cikat Gigi
Ngantuk	Hatu
Pulang	Puyang
Pedas	Pejes
Run	Wan
Horse	Hose
Motor	Moto
One	One
Two	Two
Three	Ti
Four	Fo
Five	Fa
Six	Six
Seven	Seben
Eight	Eight
Nine	Nyain
Ten	Ten
Eleven	Ven
Twelve	Twef
Jeruk	Jewuk
Pisang	Sang
Stroberi	Cobewi
Grepe	Gep

Belum	Bewum
Semut	Simut
Kunci	Kuci
Hair	Hair
Pusing	Pusing
Snow	Snow
Cold	Cold
Hot	Hot
Eyes	Eyes
Nose	Nose
Mouth	Mouth
Ear	Ear
Hand	Hand
Perut	Peyut
Uang	Uang
Red	Red
White	White
Black	Back
Pink	Pink
Blue	Bwu
Yellow	Yewow
Green	Gwin

### Analysis Table

From the table above, researchers can draw some conclusions:

1. **Word Simplification:** Bebi tends to simplify words that are difficult to pronounce. For example, "Makan" becomes "Mamam" and "Nyamuk" becomes "Amuk". This shows that the child is trying to pronounce the words in an easier way.
2. **Use of the Same Pattern:** Bebi often uses the same pattern for different words. For example, "Garpu" becomes "Mpu" and "Sendok" becomes "Cendok". This shows that the child is using familiar pronunciation patterns.

3. **Bilingual Vocabulary:** Bebi uses words from both Indonesian and English. For example, "Milk" is pronounced as "Mi" and "Ice Cream" is pronounced as "aisi". This shows that the child is exposed to both languages.
4. **Understanding of Objects and Actions:** Bebi already understands some basic concepts and objects. For example, "Baju" becomes "Haju" and "Sepatu" becomes "Patu", as well as "Makan" becomes "Mamam" and "Main" becomes "Mai". This shows that the child already understands everyday objects and actions.
5. **Pronunciation Variations:** Bebi's pronunciation varies, such as "Buka" to "Uka" and "Terimakasih" to "Asyi". This shows that the child is still in the process of learning to pronounce words correctly.
6. **Use of Simple Words:** Bebi often uses simpler forms of words. For example, "Mobil" becomes "Mbil". This shows that the child is still developing his language skills.

## Discussion

From the data collected, we can see that Bebi learns language in several ways:

1. **Imitation:** Bebi imitates words that he hears from his surroundings. For example, the child hears the word "Milk" and imitates it as "Mi".
2. **Association:** Bebi associates the sounds of words with certain objects or events. For example, "Garpu" becomes "Mpu" showing that the child associates the sound with a particular cutlery.
3. **Social Interaction:** Bebi uses language in meaningful contexts, demonstrating social and semantic understanding. For example, "Run" becomes "Wan" showing that the child understands that the word relates to fast movement.

Bebi's bilingual environment shows some distinctive features. Children who learn two languages often develop a mixed vocabulary, and their language development may differ from children who learn only one language. Research shows that bilingual children, when exposed sufficiently to both languages, can master both languages well.

## CONCLUSION

The consideration on language acquisition in early childhood, centering on a 3-year-old child named Syahlaa Zarina Al-Anwar, nicknamed Bebi, uncovers a few key discoveries. Bebi's dialect advancement is characterized by word rearrangements, the utilization of commonplace elocution designs, and a bilingual vocabulary that incorporates words from both Indonesian and English. The child's language acquisition is impacted by impersonation, affiliation, and social interaction, illustrating a solid understanding of objects and activities. The consideration highlights the significance of a bilingual environment in forming dialect advancement, as Bebi's presentation to both dialects permits for the improvement of a blended vocabulary.

Bilingual children, like Bebi, frequently create a blended vocabulary and may contrast in their dialect advancement compared to children who learn as if it were one language. Inquire about appears that bilingual children, when uncovered adequately to both dialects, can ace both dialects well. The consideration emphasizes the part of impersonation, affiliation, and social interaction in language securing, highlighting the significance of a bilingual environment in forming language advancement. This investigation contributes to our understanding of the complex handling of dialect procurement in early childhood and underscores the special highlights of bilingual language improvement.

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