

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION OF A 3 YEARS OLD CHILD IN TERMS OF PHONOLOGY,
MORPHOLOGY, AND SEMANTIC ASPECT

Sekarwangi Ardelia Putri, Siska Misellia, Tsabitah Nadia Amalia Putri, Afrilia Firnanda

English Literature Department, Universitas Pamulang, Indonesia

ardeliaputri26@gmail.com, miselliasiska@gmail.com, bitanadia235@gmail.com, afriliafirnanda23@gmail.com

Abstract

Language acquisition in early childhood is influenced by both cognitive development and social interaction. Psycholinguistics explains how children naturally learn language through mental processes and daily communication. This study observes a three-year-old child, Bulan, focusing on phonology, morphology, and semantics while highlighting the role of the family environment and parental interaction in supporting language acquisition. This study utilized a descriptive qualitative approach to observe a three-year-old child named Bulan Sabira Azka in her home surroundings over a period of two weeks. Data were collected through observation and recording of daily speech, then analyzed using thematic coding and interactive models. The study focused on early language acquisition in real-life settings using linguistic and theoretical frameworks. During the two weeks of observation, Bulan demonstrated language acquisition in the aspects of phonology, morphology, and semantics. She experienced a simplification of sounds, rudimentary word formation, and already intelligible meanings. Although not yet stable, his speech reflects the process of natural language acquisition through social interaction in the home environment. This study examines

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<p>the phonological, morphological, and semantic language acquisition of a three-year-old child. This study suggests that Bulan streamlines sounds and morphemes yet still communicates meaning successfully. Despite some inaccuracies, Bulan's language use reflects a growing understanding of actions, flavors, and colors. Bulan's linguistic growth displays a natural trajectory that is greatly influenced by social interactions and a supportive home environment.</p> <p>Keywords: Language Acquisition, Psycholinguistics, Phonology, Morphology, Semantics</p>	
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INTRODUCTION

Language and psycholinguistics are closely connected, particularly in the context of how children acquire language. Psycholinguistics examines the mental and psychological processes involved in understanding and using language. In studies of how young children learn to speak, a psycholinguistic approach helps explain how they naturally and slowly learn to recognize sounds, understand words, and build meaning (Harun et al., 2019; Meniado, 2016). These mental processes involve how the child’s brain identifies and works with language. Therefore, psycholinguistic knowledge plays a crucial role in understanding how language develops in early childhood (Sohnata Hutaurok, 2015).

The process of acquiring a first language begins at birth and continues to develop throughout early childhood. Children learn their native language naturally, without formal instruction. Through daily interaction with people around them, they begin to notice sounds, form sentences, and express themselves using grammar that fits their language. As explained by Otto (2015), children undergo a gradual language-learning process that enables them to understand and use adult grammar. Rohimajaya and Hamer (2020) noted that this development is spontaneous and follows predictable stages that reflect the child’s increasing cognitive and linguistic abilities. This development happens as a natural part of a child’s mental and cognitive growth.

The social environment, particularly the family, has a significant influence on how three-year-old children acquire language. Through everyday conversations at home, children naturally pick up language without realizing it. Friska and Syafi'i (2021) emphasized that talking with parents and other family members is the primary source of language learning for young children. Similarly, Handayani, Rafli, and Boeriswati (2021) found that frequent verbal interaction within the family setting significantly contributes to phonological development. The more they interact with people around them, the quicker their language abilities develop. Hence, social interaction plays an essential function in the procedure of first language acquisition (Natsir et al., 2023).

Parents play a crucial role in supporting children as they develop their language skills. They offer consistent exposure to language and interact in a supportive and motivating way with their children's attempts to communicate. Hidayani (2021) notes that parents possess a considerable influence regarding the cognitive and language acquisition of children through emotional and interactive exchanges. Safitri and Hakim (2018) also stated that parental support is significant in helping children master phonological aspects well in their early lives. Introducing children to new vocabulary and phrases is very important for their daily activities. Therefore, active parental involvement significantly aids in the progress of children's language acquisition.

Competence and performance are two important components in the process of language acquisition. Performance shows how well a child uses language effectively. Competence shows a child's internal understanding of language structures such as phonology, morphology, and semantics. According to Rohimajaya and Hamer (2020), children at the age of three begin to demonstrate their language skills through simple sentences and basic vocabulary, which indicates their understanding of language structure. This is also supported by Sohnata Hutaurok (2015), who stated that children between the ages of one and three begin to combine words meaningfully as part of their language acquisition. These two aspects grow together and help each other in the process of learning a language.

This study aims to address the following primary study questions:

1. How does the language acquisition process of a 3-year-old child manifest in terms of phonological, morphological, and semantic aspects?

2. How do social and environmental factors influence phonological, morphological, and semantic aspects in 3-year-old children?

This study is based on the theory of language acquisition by Gleason and Ratner (2017), which posits that language acquisition involves both innate abilities and external influences. Gleason and Ratner (2017) suggest that a child's language acquisition is influenced not only by the growth of their brain but also by the amount of language they hear and the social environment in which they are surrounded. This study examines the language acquisition of a three-year-old child named Bulan Sabira Azkadina, with a focus on phonology, morphology, and semantics.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method. The subject of this research is a three-year-old child named Bulan Sabira Azkadina, who is in the early stages of language learning. According to Creswell (2016), qualitative research is a method for exploring and understanding the meaning that people or groups attribute to a social or human issue. It includes open-ended questions, data collected in real-life settings, and analysis that moves from specific details to general ideas. In this research, the researcher aimed to describe early language acquisition by observing the child naturally at home.

Data sources play an important role in qualitative studies. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that sources of qualitative data can include people, documents, observations, and audiovisual materials. In this study, the primary source of data was Bulan's natural speech during everyday conversations over a period of two weeks. Additional data came from theories and previous studies on early language learning, which helped support the analysis (Ary et al., 2018).

Collecting data in qualitative research employs various methods to gain a deeper understanding of human behavior (Creswell, 2016). In this case, data were gathered through observing and recording Bulan's speech. Tracy (2020) noted that qualitative researchers often work closely with participants to collect detailed information. Observations were done over two weeks at the child's home, where she spoke freely without any prepared questions, allowing her language use to appear naturally.

Analyzing qualitative data is a continuous process that includes organizing, coding, and understanding the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the researcher employed an interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), which involves selecting important data, presenting it clearly, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The analysis focused on patterns in Bulan’s speech, including vocabulary, sentence structure, and communication style. Thematic coding was employed to examine the child’s language acquisition from a linguistic perspective (Nowell et al., 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Phonology Development

The vowel and consonant sounds identified from the data collected over a two-week observation period are presented below:

Table 1. List Utterances of Phonology Development

No	Utterances	Meaning	English
1.	Gatau	Tidak tahu	I don’t know
2.	Belom	Belum	Not yet
3.	Nenan	Berenang	Swimming
4.	Lumah	Rumah	House
5.	Bitu	Bisa	Can
6.	Tolonin	Tolong	Help
7.	Anet	Hangat	Warm temperature
8.	Laca tobeli	Rasa stroberi	Strawberry flavor
9.	Wana unu	Warna ungu	Purple
10.	Kacih	Terima kasih	Thank you

At the phonological level, Bulan has acquired the basic vowels /a/, /i/, /u/, /e/, and /o/ and can produce a range of phonemes. However, some phonemes are still pronounced incorrectly or inconsistently. She demonstrates difficulties in articulating certain consonants, particularly in the middle of words. Bowen (2023) explained that this type of sound change is known as phonological simplification, which often occurs in young children when they replace more

complex sounds, such as /r/, with simpler ones, like /l/. For example, the sound [r] is often substituted with [l], as seen in *rumah* becoming *lumah* and *rasa stroberi* becoming *laca tobeli*. Similarly, the [s] sound is often replaced with other phonemes, such as in *bisa* becoming *bita* or *stroberi* becoming *tobeli*, where the consonant cluster [str] is reduced to a simpler form.

Other patterns also emerge, such as the loss of initial syllables or consonants in multisyllabic words. In *terima kasih*, the child says *kacih*, omitting the first three syllables. She also demonstrates the substitution of nasal sounds, such as *tolongin* becoming *tolonin*, where the nasal [ŋ] is replaced with [n]. In some words like *anget*, pronounced *anet*, the middle consonant [g] is dropped entirely. This phenomenon reflects the tendency of young children to leave out syllables or individual sounds in longer words as their phonological processing skills are still developing (Vihman, 2016).

In addition, reduplication and simplification occur, as seen in *the example of berenang* becoming *nenan*, which indicates a tendency to reduce complex words into more manageable forms. In the case of *warna ungu* becoming *wana unu*, both consonant omission and substitution are evident. These phonological simplifications are likely influenced by the developmental stage of her speech organs, particularly the incomplete growth of teeth and limited tongue coordination. As stated by McLeod, S., & Baker, E. (2017), children simplify complex word forms by reducing consonant clusters, deleting syllables, or repeating more manageable segments. This simplification process reflects their current level of motor and cognitive development. Although children have developed their language skills, the number and accuracy of their phoneme pronunciations are still incomplete.

Morphology Development

In the morphological aspect, Bulan produced several words that show an early understanding of morphemes, although many of them were still incomplete or altered in form. As Lyster, Hulme, and Snowling (2016) noted, children develop morphological knowledge as a natural part of language learning, and their morphological constructions may initially be unstable or fragmented. For instance, she said *gatau* to mean *nggak tahu*, which is an informal combination lacking a complete morphemic structure. She also uttered *belum*, a shortened form of *belum sekolah*, where the morpheme is incomplete. The word *gi* was used in *gi main game* to

mean *lagi*, dropping the initial morpheme *la-*. In *tapi mau udah nenan na*, the word *berenang* appeared in a fragmented and repetitive form, showing instability in morpheme construction.

Additionally, there were phonological influences on morphemes, as in *lumah* for *rumah*, where the root word changed due to articulation. The child also said *anet* to mean *anget*, where the phonemic change impacted the morpheme. Hoff (2018) emphasized that children's phonological abilities place constraints on their morphological production, especially during the period when both systems are still developing. The utterance *bita don* represented *bisa dong*, with incorrect morpheme formation. This creates non-standard but meaningful utterances such as mergers, omissions, and reduplications. In *bauk kambing*, the base word *bau* was pronounced as *bauk* used within a sentence structure that was not yet fully developed. According to Tomasello (2019), children do not acquire adult-like morphology all at once; instead, they gradually build grammatical constructions through repeated social interactions and communication needs. For instance, *bana wanana* was used for *banyak warnanya*, showing both shortening and repetition, resulting in an incomplete morphemic form.

Table 2. List Utterances of Morphology Development

No	Utterances	Meaning	English
1.	Gatau	Tidak Tahu	I don't know
2.	Belom	Belum	Not yet
3.	Gi main Game	Lagi main game	Playing a game
4.	Tapi mau udah nenan-na	Sudah cukup berenangnya.	I've had enough swimming
5.	Lumah	Rumah	House
6.	Bita don!	Tentu bisa (melakukannya)	Sure I can
7.	Tolonin	Tolong	Help
8.	Bau kambing	Bau kambing	Smell of goat
9.	Anet	Hangat	Warm temperature
10.	Bana wanana	Banyak warnanya	A lot of colours

Based on the morphological findings, the child has begun to develop an understanding of word formation, although many of the utterances still show incomplete or nonstandard morphemes. Most of the words she used are daily expressions shaped by informal speech patterns and phonological simplification. Clark (2016) stated that children tend to simplify complex morphological structures during the early stages of language acquisition. These include shortened or combined forms such as *gatau* from *nggak tahu* and *belum sekolah*, which indicate that her word choices are heavily influenced by her everyday interactions and spoken language environment. Another example is the word *tolonin*, derived from *tolong*, which showed a misapplication of affixation, resembling an imperative structure. The majority of her vocabulary stems from direct and repetitive exposure to everyday situations, allowing her to construct meanings even when the morphemic structure is not yet fully developed.

Semantics Development

In semantics acquisition, the researcher found Bulan's utterances to be as follows:

Table 3. List Utterances of Semantics Development

No	Utterances	Meaning	English
1.	Game apa tebat?	Game apa tebak?	Guess the game!
2.	Tapi mau udah nenan na	Sudah cukup berenangnya.	I've had enough swimming
3.	Aku gi main game	Aku sedang bermain game	I'm playing the game
4.	Bauk siapa?	Aroma siapa?	Whose smell?
5.	Rasa tobeli	Rasa stroberi	Strawberry flavor
6.	Wana unu	Warna ungu	Purple
7.	Tante Titen	Tante Misel (Her aunty's name)	Aunty Misel
8.	Bitu don	Tentu bisa!	Sure I can
9.	Bauk kambing	Aroma kambing	Smell of goat
10.	Anet	Hangat	Warm temperature

Based on the interview results, Bulan's speech indicates that she is currently in the stage of active semantic development. For example, expressions like *Game apa tebat?* and *Aku gi main game* shows that she can express her intentions and ideas using simple sentence structures. As Hoff (2018) notes, in the early stages of language acquisition, children begin to use language not only to label objects but also to convey intentions and emotions and participate in social exchanges. Although there are some phonological inaccuracies, such as saying *tebat* instead of *tebak*, and *gi* instead of *lagi*, her meaning is still easily understood by adults. Vihman (2016) explained that young children often produce word forms that are not phonologically perfect but are still understood in the context of everyday interactions.

As stated by Bavin and Naigles (2015), children's semantic development is highly dependent on exposure to diverse vocabulary in everyday life contexts. Utterances such as *Tapi mau udah nenan na*, *Rasa tobeli*, and *Wana ungu* demonstrate that Bulan has begun to grasp concepts related to actions, taste, and color. Her use of words like *nenan* for *berenang* and *tobeli* for *stroberi* suggests that she is actively linking real-world experiences to verbal expressions. From a semantic perspective, these utterances carry clear communicative intent and are understandable within the context of everyday conversation.

Bulan's ability to name people, as in *Tante Titen*, and to express her capabilities through phrases like *"Bita don"* shows that she is developing an understanding of social relationships and is capable of expressing her desires or abilities. Even though some names or expressions are not pronounced accurately, such as *Titen* for *Misel* or *Bita don* for *Tentu bisa*, they reflect progress in both semantic comprehension and phonological exploration. This supported the findings of Rowe and Weisleder (2015) that children's acquisition of word meaning is influenced by social interactions and direct experiences that enable children to group and understand vocabulary in a semantic context.

In general, Bulan's language use reflects a natural process of semantic growth typical for children her age. Although her speaking ability is still developing, it is already clear that she can use language with the correct meaning in specific contexts, effectively improving their language skills. This evidence indicates that she is actively learning how words contribute

meaning to her sentences. Additionally, the support of a communicative environment plays a crucial role in helping Bulan learn her first language effectively.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed language acquisition in three-year-olds named Bulan Sabira Azkadina, focusing on aspects of phonology, morphology, and semantics. The results showed that in phonology, Bulan had mastered the basic vowels but still experienced specific difficulties with consonant articulation, such as the substitution of /r/ with /l/ and the omission of syllables or consonants. Morphologically, she began to understand word formation but often used incomplete or nonstandard morphemes, influenced by informal speech patterns and phonological simplifications. On the semantic aspect, Bulan exhibits active development, as it can express intentions and ideas using simple sentence structures and understand concepts of action, taste, and color despite phonological inaccuracies. In everyday conversation, the meaning can still be understood. In general, Bulan's mastery of her first language reflects the natural process of semantic development; a supportive social and communication environment greatly facilitates her mastery of her first language.

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