

AN ANALYSIS OF PHONOLOGICAL, MORPHOLOGICAL, AND SEMANTIC ASPECTS IN THE FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESS IN THREE-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN

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Abstract

Every child born into this world can acquire language. In language acquisition, not every child can immediately speak the language correctly. Language acquisition is a crucial phase in the cognitive growth and verbal interaction of young children. This study examines first language acquisition in 3-year-old children with an emphasis on phonology, morphology, and semantics. The objective of this research is to identify the types of errors involving phonology, morphology, and semantics. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method using observation techniques to analyze children's daily conversations within the home. The findings indicate that children often substitute sounds, such as replacing the phoneme /r/ with /l/, and begin to understand the formation of base words with affixes, although errors in their use still occur. These findings suggest that children's language skills develop gradually, starting from sound simplification to word formation processes, in line with the linguistic development phases of young children.

Keywords: First language acquisition, phonology, morphology, semantics, young children.

Article History

Received: Juni 2025

Reviewed: Juni 2025

Published: Juni 2025

Plagirism Checker: No 235

Prefix DOI :

[10.8734/Argopuro.v1i2.365](https://doi.org/10.8734/Argopuro.v1i2.365)

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Publish by : Argopuro



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INTRODUCTION

First language acquisition in early childhood is a crucial process that impacts future communication and cognitive development. By around three years of age, children begin to understand various elements of language, not only in the areas of phonology, morphology, and semantics but also in syntax. This process occurs naturally as children interact with their environment and the people around them. Dardjowidjojo (2000) states that first language acquisition is the process by which children create an internal language system through interaction with their environment, particularly through communication with parents or caregivers.

At the age of three, children reach a significant milestone in language development. They not only begin to pronounce words more accurately but also begin to construct simple word structures and grasp meaning in the context of conversation. In analyzing these aspects, phonology, morphology, and semantics are taken into consideration. Phonology is a part of a language's grammar that defines the sound patterns of spoken phrases (Chomsky & Halle, 1968). In this aspect, speech is analyzed based on the pronunciation of each letter. Three-year-olds often make mistakes in pronouncing

each letter. The next aspect is morphology; Chomsky (1965) views morphology as part of internal grammar, which is a set of rules in the human mind that govern the creation and combination of words. Morphology functions in the construction of syntax and the creation of words using affixes, reduplication, and so on. The final aspect of this study is semantics. Semantics encompasses the rules that give meaning to syntactic structures (Chomsky, 1965).

Researchers have conducted several studies related to first language acquisition. One example is the study conducted by Safitri and Hakim (2018) on a three-year-old child named Andi Ahmad. This study focused on phonological acquisition and demonstrated that the child had mastered vowel sounds, including /a/, /i/, /u/, /o/, and /e/, as well as consonants such as /p/, /b/, /m/, and /t/. However, the child was not yet able to produce consonant sounds such as /k/, /s/, and /r/. The research findings also indicate several instances of sound substitution and omission, suggesting that the child's speech articulation is still in the developmental stage. This study demonstrates that phonological development in children progresses in stages and can be influenced by both genetic and environmental factors.

Another study, conducted by Ismahani et al. (2024), focused on the mastery of phonological, semantic, and syntactic aspects in a 3-year-old child named Kamila. Data was obtained through observation and brief interactions. The results showed that Kamila could produce five basic vowels and construct simple sentences for communication. However, there were still some instances of inappropriate word usage, particularly in the semantic aspect. This study emphasizes that the language acquisition process in children is greatly influenced by daily interactions and language input from their surroundings. Both studies indicate that children's language development before they start school is significantly influenced by their environment, including their parents, family, and peers.

Previous research has demonstrated that environmental factors have a significant impact on children's acquisition of their first language. Support from the child's environment has a significant influence on the fluency of a child's speech. The environment needs to convey positive things so that interactions with children can run smoothly. Hurlock (1978) states that children's abilities develop gradually and are influenced by both genetic and environmental factors, including parenting, education, and social interaction. This study aims to discuss word acquisition in the aspects of phonology, morphology, and semantics in three-year-old children.

METHOD

In this study, the researchers used a descriptive qualitative approach. Creswell (2014) states that qualitative research is a method for exploring and understanding the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human issue. The subject of this study is Uwais Alqarni, who is three years old. The language used in this family is a mixture of the local language and Indonesian. However, Uwais' parents always use Indonesian with Uwais. Other participants in this study are Uwais' parents. The study was conducted at Uwais' home. Data for this study was collected through observation and video recordings of Uwais with his parents. Data was recorded when Uwais engaged in various activities, such as eating, singing, and listening to music with his parents. After collecting the data, the researchers analyzed it using aspects of phonology, morphology, and semantics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Phonology

Phonology is a branch of linguistics that studies the system and patterns of sounds in a language. In the context of first language acquisition, phonology refers to a child's ability to recognize, produce, and distinguish sounds of a language as part of the communication process. This aspect includes vowel sounds, consonants, and patterns of stress and intonation in words. Phonology is a system of rules that map abstract representations of linguistic forms onto phonetic representations (Chomsky & Halle, 1968).

In this study, the researcher observed and analyzed the first language in the form of phonology. In the aspect of phonology, the researcher found the following utterances from Uwais.

No	Utterances	Meaning
1	Alo	Halo
2	Ko	Ini
3	Lo ku	Apa ini
4	Ua	Uang
5	Iyin	Oren
6	Ninin	Dingin
7	Anan	Jangan
8	Di	Pergi
9	Huar	Luar
10	Nyi	Nyanyi

Based on phonological analysis, particularly in phoneme mastery, Uwais can produce several vowel sounds such as [a], [i], [u], [o], [e] and initial consonants such as [n], [m], [d], [y], [l], [k], [h], although not yet entirely accurate. In the data obtained, phonological processes such as sound substitution (e.g., /r/ becoming /y/ in the word "Iyin" for Oren), sound deletion (e.g., /h/ being omitted in "Alo" for "Halo"), and syllable simplification (e.g., "Ua" for "Uang") were identified.

Pronunciations such as "Anan," which means "Jangan," and "Di," which means "Pergi," reflect a typical phonological pattern in three-year-old children, where complex sounds like /g/ or /j/ are often replaced or omitted. Consonant sounds such as [r] and fricatives such as [s] and [v] were not found in the data, indicating that the child is in the early stages of phonological development, consistent with the normal articulation stage for that age. This is also supported by Suwandi Theory (2010), which states that by the age of three, children typically master approximately 50 words and begin to form simple sentences. This data suggests that Uwais is actively engaged in the process of acquiring phonology, though he has not yet reached a fully developed stage.

2. Morphology

In the context of first language acquisition, morphology encompasses how children begin to recognize and produce word forms, such as roots, affixation, and reduplication. The grammar of a language includes a set of rules that specify how

morphemes are combined to form words (Chomsky, 1965). In terms of morphology, the researcher identified the following utterances from Uwais.

No	Utterances	Meaning
1	Titak	Cicak
2	Nak	Enak
3	Iyya	Iya
4	Pappa	Papa
5	Mamma	Mama
6	Di lin	panggilin
7	Ceklah	Bicaralah
8	Om let	Om telolet
9	Yo war	Ayo keluar
10	Ama iya	Iya mama

In terms of morphology, Uwais creates various word forms that reflect the early stages of morphological development. He has been able to produce words, even though his pronunciation remains unclear. Words such as "Titak" mean "Cicak" and "Nak" mean "Enak" demonstrate simplification through the omission or replacement of several sounds. The words "Iyya", "Pappa", and "Mamma" are examples of reduplication, which is the repetition of part of a syllable, often used by children as a form of expression or familiarity.

More complex morphological features are evident in utterances such as "Di lin", a shortened form of "panggilin" that consists of the root word "panggil" and the suffix "-in". This indicates that children are starting to grasp the application of affixes, although they are not yet entirely accurate. Nevertheless, Uwais functionally demonstrates mastery of morphological functions. Expressions such as "Om let" means "Om telolet", "Yo war" means "Ayo keluar", and "Ama iya" means "Iya mama" reflect that children are beginning to try to combine two words into simple phrases.

The child's morphological knowledge, although still in the process of development, has shown the ability to change and combine sounds and morphemes to produce meaningful expressions. This is related to Traxel's (2012) research, which suggests that children learn words starting from the most basic units, such as single terms or two-word phrases, and begin to put words together by the age of two.

3. Semantic

Semantics is one of the important aspects of children's first language acquisition. In the context of first language proficiency, semantics is related to children's ability to understand and utilize the meaning of words in the context in which they are used in communication. According to Palmer (1981), semantics is a part of linguistics that studies the meaning and relationship between language forms and the concepts they represent. In the semantic aspect, the researcher found the following utterances from Uwais.

No	Utterances	Meaning
1	Titak pa pa	Cicak di dinding
2	Dupin ya	Hidupin ya
3	Lau kem	Mau kemana
4	Ya ti tak	Ya atau tidak
5	Ici ciam	Ini siapa

Semantics is the study of meaning in language. It deals with the relationship between linguistic forms and their meanings (Lyons, 1977). Based on observations of Uwais, researchers concluded that he began to express his intentions through speech, even though the structure was not yet perfect. For example, in the utterance "Titak pa pa," the child is trying to convey "Cicak di dinding," which demonstrates an understanding of the object "Cicak" and its location "dinding." [This](#) indicates that the child has understood the meaning of place or location. The utterance "Dupin ya" means "hidupin ya" which is a request to perform a specific action. Meanwhile, "Lau kem" means "ingin pergi kemana" which is a question about direction or destination. Although not yet complete syntactically, the child has demonstrated an understanding of the interrogative structure from a semantic aspect. In "Ya ti tak" the child demonstrates an understanding of the concept of choice or difference in meaning "ya atau tidak", which is a form of semantic opposition. Finally, "Ici ciam" means "siapa ini," indicating that the child has understood the question form for identifying someone, which is crucial in social interaction. The researcher concludes that the child is in the phase of semantic competence development, where they begin to associate language with meaning and the real-world context around them.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this research, the researchers can conclude that the process of acquiring a first language in three-year-old children occurs gradually and naturally. In terms of phonology, children can pronounce almost all vowel sounds and some initial consonants, although phonological processes are still evident. [This](#) indicates that children are in the early stages of developing speech articulation. In terms of morphology, children begin to use basic word forms and demonstrate an understanding of reduplication and affixation, although they are not yet entirely grammatically correct. The process of creating simple words, such as "panggil" and "yo", shows children's efforts to combine morphemes and form basic morphological structures. Meanwhile, in terms of semantics, children are already able to convey intentions and ask questions. Children demonstrate an understanding of the concepts of position, action, questions, and choices, indicating that their semantic abilities are developing in the context of communication. Language acquisition, in terms of phonology, morphology, and semantics, is greatly influenced by the child's environment. Parents, family, and caregivers play a significant role in a child's language acquisition. Children will always observe and listen to those around them to imitate. Hence, the more interaction with the child, such as engaging in conversation, singing, and other activities, the better it is for their language acquisition.

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