

The Language Acquisition of A Two-Year-Old Girl “Aline”

Hanisah Hanafi*
Universitas Negeri Gorontalo
hanisahhanafi65@gmail.com

Silvana Hasan
Universitas Gorontalo
silvanahasan@yahoo.com

Dewi Kusumaningsih
Universitas Veteran Bantara
dewikus1728@gmail.com

Abstract. One point of view from language acquisition is how children get their language for the first time. This stage has a unique process before having a complete language. It can be seen from the words produced, which are different from adults. A two-year-old little girl shows the uniqueness of acquiring language. The child lives with her parents and her extended families who are multilingual of Bahasa Indonesia, Gorontalo, Gorontalo dialect, and English. By these differences, the cultural and language impact cannot be avoided by them. The first language acquisition mastered by the little girl came from the parents and the environment. The data was collected by surveying the girl every day, communicating with her, and recording conversation took place. The sentences that she spoke were mixing some languages in daily communication as if the words come from one language. The sentences were adjusted to whom she was speaking. When talking to her mother, she spoke in English, but then she changed the language into Bahasa Indonesia when talking to her father; she once again changed the use of language when talking to her friends or other family members by mixing up all languages she knew. Aline learned language based on behaviorist reinforcement principles by associating words with meaning around her. She knew how the words work by changing the language to whom she spoke to. Aline spoke by stringing words from several languages, which seems to originate from only one language.

Keywords: *language acquisition, bilingual, code-mixing*

INTRODUCTION

For linguists, the look of people communicate in diverse languages has been such an intriguing trend in the realm of language acquisition and has been a

crucial question fundamental to humankind. The present paper attempts to provide a robust analysis of the study on a child's language acquisition. Specifically, it questioned a problem portraying a two-year-old female toddler in using her languages during the communication process.

Generally speaking, the ability of someone to use two languages in turn fluently is dubbed as bilingualism [1], [2]. Bilingualism for [3] has been a widespread phenomenon. It has been to date increasing in the number of speakers across the globe, with nearly exact estimation one of three people being bilingual or multilingual. As such, it has been a typical thing in many countries encountering folks who are well expertise in two or more languages, not to mention Indonesia.

As was implied in the paragraph mentioned earlier, it is common in Indonesia that the majority of its speakers are well equipped with two or more languages. It is because Indonesia has been a house of diverse ethnic where every ethnic has its local language as the mother tongue and is unified by Bahasa Indonesia as the national language [4]; [5]; [6]. Owing to this fact, most of the children in Indonesia grow up with at least two languages from an early age.

In the home environment of the children, they communicate with parents and other family members using the local language. Yet, as the children grow along with other relations which spread outside their homes, they accept other languages apart from their mother tongue. Usually, the language used outside the home environment is the Malay dialect of the region concerned, which may be mixed with the local languages.

As has previously been echoed, Indonesian people speak more than one language at home, and particularly those belonging to a different region that has different local languages. For children growing in such an atmosphere they must be encountered a unique linguistic phenomenon whereby their parents speak in different vernacular coupled with their faculty of Bahasa Indonesia. Interestingly, the bilingual learning

process is most likely to take place naturally in households in which two languages are used in turn, and that the children can be bilinguals [6]. Most interestingly, however, it lies in the bilingual parents who are most likely to have a strong desire to nurture their children being fluent and dynamic bilinguals.

Furthermore, parents and scholars have touted the advantage of teaching a foreign language, English in particular, to their toddlers following the need to speak English nowadays. Parents, therefore, strive to find the most fitting ways to support their children for having mastery of several languages, including foreign languages, as with the best understanding of the mechanism lying beneath the language acquisition process in the early years of age.

The points in the previous description occur to a two-year-old toddler narrated to the present article named Aline, who are privileged to be exposed to diverse languages, making her slightly different from other children on her age. Her parent, particularly her mother, is proficient in several languages, including Gorontalo Malay, Bahasa Indonesia, and English. Her father, by contrast, is only proficient in Gorontalo, Gorontalo Malay, and Bahasa Indonesia. While most people in her surrounding merely utilize the local languages of Gorontalo and Gorontalo Malay.

In a daily routine, Aline spends her activities in her house, communicating with her parents and other relatives as well. In terms of communication, Aline is considered active, precisely since her mother always actively communicates with her. Moreover, in an attempt to ensure that Aline will be well capable of speaking English, her mother always invites Aline to communicate in English throughout the conversation, while occasionally inserting Indonesian at the same time or vice versa. Different from the mother, Aline's Father communicates with Aline using Bahasa Indonesia with limited English vocabulary. Scholar [7] posits that toddlers regularly figure out "which sounds they hear the most." Hence, it can be said that Aline has more exposure to English words than Bahasa Indonesia.

From the above illustration, suffice to say that the language acquisition process experienced by Aline has been an astonishing phenomenon. It is because Aline is capable of communicating in two languages with special remarks on English, meaning that Aline sometimes inserts Bahasa Indonesia word in a sentence or phrase she utters. Nonetheless, the crux of such a phenomenon taking place in Aline's family has been misunderstood by several people.

In addition to the misunderstanding, "conventional wisdom" opines that in the case of mixing words in the bilingual children's utterances, such language phenomenon has been considered as evidence of the confusion of the children themselves

[7]. Contradicting to a popularly held view of misunderstanding and confusion, the provided tutorial demonstrated in the present article has been a part of linguistic phenomena, which is further termed as code-mixing. As noted in [8], code-mixing is probably resulted by incompetence performed by the speakers. In a different vein, code-mixing has been a joint development of language faculties within bilingual children's linguistic repertoire, and those bilingual children themselves have a particular reason for doing code-mixing [9]. As with the case presented in the current study, the toddler, Aline, mixed two languages, namely English and Bahasa Indonesia, since her parents did the same way when communicating. Moreover, children naturally imitate their surroundings in the experiment of communicating in languages [10]. As such, it is undeniable that what Aline does must be strikingly similar to what her parents and surroundings do.

METHOD

The current paper was designed qualitatively employing a case study approach. Through this approach, the researchers observed language acquisition of a two-year-old child named "Aline" who lived in a multilingual environment. To collect the research data, the researchers collected recordings containing the development of Aline's language faculties gathered by her parents as the primary research data. The secondary data were obtained by interviewing both of her parents. Aline's mother is fluent in Bahasa Indonesia, English, and Malay Gorontalo. On the contrary, Gorontalo and Gorontalo Malay were the languages used by the most in the family's surrounding environment. Prior to the analysis stage, the video recordings that contained conversations of the child and her parents were repeatedly played and listened to. The words, phrases, and sentences uttered by Aline were coded and classified according to whom Aline talked and to which language/words she used. The classified data were then verified to further recognizing both code-mixing and code-switching committed by Aline during conversations.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The current paper attempted to address the underlying inquiry as to how a bilingual female toddler experiment with her languages in the surrounding atmosphere. Based on the research data gathered in the field, it is revealed that in a case of communicating with the core family, i.e., the mother and father, Aline uses English so often. Yet, when it comes to a different environment, mainly when she plays with her friends,

she tends to use Bahasa Indonesia with a small English insertion. Besides, Aline committed to mixing the languages of both Indonesian and English regardless of situations and environments.

Below is an excerpt of Aline when communicating with his father, who is fluent in Indonesian:

Dad : Aline, *mau* roti?

Aline: yes

Mom: Do you want bread?

Aline: No

(Aline does not want the bread at all)

It can be seen from the conversation that Aline is more likely to understand something in English than she does in another language. From the data, it seemed that she does not want bread. Questions from his father were naturally answered with “yes” even though she did not wish to the stuff offered because she did not understand the object in question. Her mother’s question, on the other hand, was answered “no” because she understood that what was meant was bread.

While in case of communicating with her mother, the conversation was naturally made more in English, as her mother very often starts conversations in English. At the same time, Aline also commits to code-mixing; she uses English words with a small insertion of Bahasa Indonesia.

Aline: Do you ... bread?

Mom: Yes, I like bread.

Mom: Do you like chocolate cookies?

Aline: Yes, I like chocolate cookies.

Mom: what about banana?

Aline: yes, I like bananas. I like ... I like *potong*. I like bananas ... ice cream

Mom: Ok. You put the bananas on the ice cream

Aline: Yes, bananas ice cream ... banana *ada* ... papaya ... *ada* vegetables, *ada* papaya, *ada* rice *ada* fish *ada* obat, *ada* *kerupuk*, *ada* nasi.

Mom: What is *nasi*?

She did not answer.

The linguistic phenomenon of code-mixing committed by Aline was the use of Bahasa Indonesia ‘*potong*’ (cut), ‘*ada*’ (there), ‘*obat*’ (medicine), ‘*kerupuk*’ (crackers), and ‘*nasi*’ (rice). Those Indonesian words are new vocabularies she acquires from mutual associations with friends around her. At the end of the conversation, her mother asked, ‘What is rice?’, because the word ‘rice’ is a word that Aline has never spoken in front of her mother before.

The following extracts are excerpts of a conversation between Aline and her parents:

Ayah: What is that?

Aline: ... (she didn’t answer)

Ayah: Aline suka mango?

Aline: hm ee... *aku suka* mango.

Ayah: Kalau banana?

Aline: *Aku mau* bananas.

Ayah: Aline suka semangka?

Aline: *Semangka* (while nodding) hm ... mm

Ayah: Aline suka?

Aline: Yeah

Mom: Do you know semangka?

Aline: Yeah

Mom: What is *semangka*?

Aline: ...

Mom: Watermelon.

Aline: Watermelon.

Ayah: *Warna apa* watermelon.

Aline: Green

Ayah: Aline *suka* cucumber?

Aline: I *suka* cucumber

Ayah: Cucumber *warna apa*?

Aline: Green

The conversation above is a portrait of the changes that occurred to Aline since she begins to communicate intensively with her friends to get along with the environment other than the core family. Previously, Aline was only able to communicate using English. This is consistent with what [11], that children learning a second language or two languages at the same time will often do switching language or even using both languages in the same sentence uttered. On top of that, such code-switching is not evidence of hindrances in the language learning process. On the contrary, this shows that children understand the grammar rules of the two languages. It is believed that children usually utilize this strategy to clarify their meaning in a grammatically appropriate and proper. Furthermore, if multilingual children do not know the relevant word in the language they are using, replacing the word with another language to communicate the target meaning is considered as logical to do. As [9] avowed, code-mixing has been a normal part of bilingual development, and that bilingual children have certainly reasonable opinions for doing code-mixing.

In the movement process of Aline to the outside environment, there is a long adaptation period. A few weeks later, Aline always returned home and cried as she was unable to communicate with her friends. This is because her friends did not understand what Aline said, and vice versa, so that communication did not run successfully. However, as time went on, a child needs to socialize with his environment. Aline still stayed with her friends, listened to her friends, and gradually began to grasp any words that she could understand. Finally, she began to absorb a few words and was able to communicate with each other. Aline absorbs and learns words, phrases, and even sentences in Bahasa Indonesia, as do her friends. They began to absorb and

use English, but only for a few words. However, when Aline returned to her core family, she returned to using English, which gradually began to insert Bahasa Indonesia in conversation. During the experiment, language barriers always occur that affect Aline to be more silent. Aline finally murmurs, which for her mother, Aline does not know what she is going to say for sure.

The following excerpts are Aline's conversations with her friends:

Friend: *Aline masak apa?*

Aline : *Masak ... donat.*

Friend: *Ini?*

Aline : *donat... yellow.*

Friend: *Ini?*

Aline : orange.

Friend: *Ini?*

Aline : *Ini ada donat purple...grape, pineapple,*

Ini ada donat grey, yellow and purple.

Ini pineapple... jang buang.

Code mixing can be seen as the most straightforward method or technique with the lowest error rate, as a sign that bilingual children are able to do that. Bilingual children do not use both of their languages carelessly [11]. A two-year-old child shows their faculty to modulate the language they know according to the language used by their interlocutors [12], as did by the child in the present article. Some Indonesian words that are mixed into English still adhere to rules such as predictable grammar, most of which are similar to the rules governing the mixing of codes in adults [13].

CONCLUSION

Aline's nuclear family uses English as her communication language, which is a little bit inserted into Indonesian because her father is not fluent in English. Before Aline got along with the environment other than her core family, she communicated using English. Despite not mastering English, his father tried to communicate with Aline using English even though occasionally insert Indonesian words into his conversation. After Aline got along and started communicating with her other environment, it was seen that Aline's language absorption was getting richer. The English language he has been using has begun to diminish, overwritten by the Indonesian language obtained from his friends. However, when Aline was back in her core family environment, she returned to use English, which had been inserted by a few Indonesian words. From the process experienced by Aline, there was a mixing of the code, whether the entry of Indonesian into their English conversation, or the English that entered Aline's Indonesian conversation. This is the same as what some

researchers previously found that the two systems obtained by children experience interference known as Cross-Linguistic Influence (CLI), which involves transfer and interference. In other words, the two language systems that develop can influence each other, as discovered by [9].

REFERENCES

- [1] J. Holmes, "Bilingual babies: Study shows how exposure to a foreign language ignites infants' learning," 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://www.washington.edu/news/2017/07/17/bilingual-babies-study-shows-how-exposure-to-a-f>.
- [2] E. Lanza, *Language mixing in infant bilingualism: A sociolinguistic perspective*. Oxford: Oxford, 2004.
- [3] L. Wei, *The Bilingualism Reader*. London, 2000.
- [4] M. L. Dakan, "The Indonesian Languages as a results of wider communication," 2000. [Online]. Available: <https://www.swarthmore.edu/linguistics/linguistics-tri-college-class-2010>.
- [5] Muziatun., "Lexical Borrowing in Indonesian Printed Media.," 2017.
- [6] D. Bach, "Bilingual babies: Study shows how exposure to a foreign language ignites infants' learning.," 2017. [Online]. Available: <https://www.washington.edu/news/2017/07/17/bilingual-babies-study-shows-how-exposure-to-a-foreign-language-ignites-infants-learning/>.
- [7] Naja Ferja Ramirez & Patricia K. Kuhl, "Bilingual Language Learning in Children." *Living Language*, 2016.
- [8] L. C. L. G. F. & Lapaquette, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, vol. 7, no. 1. London & New York: Routledge, 2013.
- [9] B. Z. Pearson, *Raising a bilingual child*. New York: Random House, 2008.
- [10] L. Comeau L., Genesee F., & Lapaquette, "The modeling hypothesis and child bilingual codemixing," *Int. J. Biling.*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2003.
- [11] & L.-W. C. Byers-Heinlein K., "Bilingualism in the Early Years: What the Science Says," vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 95–112, 2013.
- [12] E. Genesee, F., Boivin, I., & Nicoladis, "Bilingual children talking with monolingual adults: A study of bilingual communicative competence.," *Appl. Psycholinguist.*, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 427–442, 1996.
- [13] F. Paradis, J., Nicoladis, E., & Genesee, "Early emergence of structural constraints on code-mixing: Evidence from French–English bilingual children. Bilingualism: language and cognition," 2000.