

Semantic Language Skills in 2-Year-Old Children: A Case Study of Universal Substantive Acquisition at Kampung Baru

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Abstract - Language acquisition in early childhood is a crucial foundation in individual development as it is a critical period in which children rapidly and naturally learn language and communication. Speaking is a crucial language skill in everyday life. The act of speaking is closely related to language usage, and one example of this is the development of language abilities in 2-year-old children. This study aims to explore the semantic language acquisition in 2-year-old children at Kampung Baru. It is a qualitative descriptive study that focuses on the semantic language of nouns, verbs, and adjectives. This research is presented as an alternative strategy to enhance the intellectual development of children, especially at Kampung Baru, in their understanding of more complex language and communication in the future. The data source is the language used and the gestures by 2-year-old children at Kampung Baru. The data collection method employed in this study is participant observation with a semi-structured interview and complemented by recording, note-taking, and interviews. The researcher observed and recorded conversations of 2-year-old children and noted words related to the research objectives. Additionally, interviews were conducted with families of 2-year-old children at Kampung Baru during two months, specifically regarding nouns, verbs, and adjectives. The research findings indicate that 2-year-old children at Kampung Baru are capable of expressing and acquiring words accurately and in line with their intentions. They can differentiate between spoken words and actions. Furthermore, they demonstrate nonverbal language skills by expressing objects through gestures when referring to nouns, indicating actions when referring to verbs, and displaying attitudes and facial expressions when referring to adjectives.

Keywords: Language Development Skills in Children, Semantic Language Acquisition, Study of Universal Substantive

I. INTRODUCTION

In the tapestry of early childhood development, language acquisition emerges as a vibrant thread that weaves together communication and social interaction. The pivotal role of language in shaping cognitive, emotional, and social domains underscores the significance of fostering language-rich

environments for young children. Exploring the mechanisms of language acquisition not only enriches the understanding of human development but also empowers educators, parents, and policymakers to provide optimal support during this critical phase of growth. As we unlock the secrets of language acquisition, we unlock the doors to effective

communication, meaningful relationships, and the holistic development of the next generation. Language plays a significant role in daily life as it serves as a means of social interaction. In various situations, language is used to communicate ideas from speakers to listeners or writers to readers (Sugihastuti, 2000). The presence of language facilitates social interaction between individuals and their surrounding environment. Without language, humans would face difficulties in carrying out various activities. It has been proven that even in the womb, a child engages in activities related to speech, such as tactile communication that can be responded to by the mother. Thus, from an early age, when the child is born, they already produce variations of language in the form of crying sounds. From these crying sounds, parents can understand whether the child is crying due to hunger, pain, or boredom. Such reactions are also part of the aspect of speaking. According to Meilan (2014) from a behaviorist perspective, language acquisition is a process of human language development.

There are two processes involved in language acquisition in children: language acquisition and language learning. Two main factors are often associated with language acquisition: nurture and nature. Nurture refers to language acquisition influenced by the natural environment, while nature refers to language acquisition that exists from birth. This research focuses on universal language acquisition, which consists of important elements such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives. The aim is to identify the words typically spoken and acquired by 2-year-old children. At this age, children still require guidance and support from their families and the surrounding environment. Early childhood typically involves developing speaking abilities through engaging conversations with others. They use language in various ways, such as asking questions, singing, or babbling to themselves. Starting at the age of 2, children demonstrate their own ways of language acquisition, which continues to develop as they grow older and expand their vocabulary. Consequently, they become able to communicate with a broader range of individuals in their environment.

So far, no research has been found that specifically examines semantic language acquisition in universal substantive children aged 2 years at Kampung Baru. However, there are several studies that bear similarities to this

research. For instance, Wahyuningsih (2018) conducted research on second language acquisition for children; Rezeki & Sagala (2020) investigated the semantic analysis of language acquisition in three-year-old children; Azizah & Dewi (2021) examined the analysis of semantic and syntactic language development in children engaged in remote learning; Salnita, Atmazaki & Abdurrahman (2019) explored language acquisition in 3-year-old children and language acquisition for early childhood; and Fauzana, Ermanto & Basri (2013) focused on semantic acquisition in children aged 0;0-2;0 during the sensorimotor period.

Wahyuningsih's (2018) research shares similarities in terms of language acquisition in children but differs in terms of semantic acquisition, as well as the location, theory, and research methods used. Meanwhile, Rezeki & Sagala (2020), Azizah & Dewi (2021), Salnita, Atmazaki & Abdurrahman (2019), and Fauzana, Ermanto & Basri (2013) bear similarities in terms of language and semantic acquisition but differ in terms of location, theory, and research methods. Additionally, previous studies focused on semantic acquisition in general, while the present study specifically examines the acquisition of nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Furthermore, Muta'allim, Alfani, Mahidin, Agustin, & Wicaksi (2021) conducted research on the function of comparative adjectives in the Kangean dialect of the Madurese language and its impact on the Kangean community with a pragmatic study; Salikin, Muta'allim, Alfani, Hosaini, & Sayfullah (2021) investigated traditional Madurese engagement amid social changes in the Kangean society; Muta'allim, Sofyan, & Haryono (2020) examined superlative adjectives in the Kangean dialect of the Madurese language with a pragmatic study; and Haryono, Wibisono, Sofyan, & Muta'allim (2023) explored the use of speech levels by Madurese students as an implementation of politeness principles in Islamic Boarding Schools in Bondowoso, East Java.

The research conducted by Muta'alim, Nawawi, Alfani, Ghaffar, & Wafi (2021) on code switching and code mixing of sellers and buyers in traditional markets: a case study of Market Kampong Asembagus Situbondo; the research conducted by Sofyan, Yudistira, Muta'allim, Alfani, & Ghaffar (2022) on the analysis of conversational implicature between students and teachers at Al-Azhar Islamic Boarding School; the research conducted by

Yudistira, Muta'allim, Nurcaya, Julhadi & Pattiasina (2022) on the role of linguistics and local wisdom in understanding harmony between religions in Tana Toraja; and the research conducted by Yudistira, & Muta'allim (2023) on code mixing as an anti-political indiscretion among farm laborers at Ajung, Kalisat, Jember, share similarities with this study in terms of language, pragmatics, and methodology. However, this research differs in terms of the subject, object, location, and theory used. Therefore, research on semantic language skills in 2-year-old children: a case study of universal substantive acquisition at Kampung Baru has not been previously studied. Hence, the researcher is highly interested in conducting this research.

Based on several previous studies, there has not been a specific investigation into the semantic language skills in 2-year-old children: a case study of universal substantive acquisition at Kampung Baru. Therefore, the researchers felt compelled to explore this area. This research holds contributions and implications for the general audience. The contribution of this study lies in understanding the development of semantic language skills in 2-year-old children. Semantic language skills involve comprehending word meanings and the relationships between words in a language. Focusing on the acquisition of universal substantives (nouns that refer to the same concept across various languages), this research provides insights into how children at a very early developmental stage start comprehending fundamental concepts in language. In the context of the study in Kampung Baru, this contributes to an understanding of how local culture and environment influence language acquisition in children. This contribution offers insights into factors affecting language acquisition processes and how language development is recognized and channeled within the community.

The implications, on the other hand, revolve around early education that will aid teachers, caregivers, and educators in understanding semantic language acquisition in 2-year-old children. This enables them to design suitable learning approaches to help children build a strong language understanding. Furthermore, this research might support the early identification of language acquisition issues, allowing for early intervention to enhance language abilities before the subsequent

developmental stages. This research also has the potential to raise awareness about the importance of preserving local language and culture, even in the era of globalization. If children in Kampung Baru can comprehend universal concepts in their language, it will reinforce their cultural identity and provide them with tools for interaction on a broader scale. Additionally, it encourages further research on language acquisition among children with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This opens opportunities for comparing language development among children from various backgrounds, providing deeper insights into this process. Moreover, the research provides valuable community-based data on language acquisition in children from Kampung Baru. This data can be utilized for further studies and referenced in the development of educational policies and community empowerment. Thus, this research holds significant potential impact in understanding the early acquisition of semantic language skills and how it forms the basis for communication and social interaction among children in their local environment.

Based on the aforementioned background, the researcher formulates the research problem as follows: How is the semantic language acquisition in universal substantive children aged 2 years at Kampung Baru?. To answer this research problem, a semantic study is needed. Achmad (2012:91) explains that in Indonesian, semantics is derived from the English term semantics, which is translated from the Greek term *sem* (noun or sign) or *samaino* (to signify). This term is used by linguists to refer to the part of language that studies meaning. Thus, semantics can be defined as the science that studies the relationship between linguistic signs and the things they signify, or the science of meaning and significance. Every child has a different ability to understand conversations depending on their psychological development. Children have their own ways of understanding word meanings. In the early stages of life, babies spend time observing and gathering as much information as possible from their surrounding environment. This observation is carried out through all their senses. The observed and gathered information becomes their "world knowledge." Based on this world knowledge, babies develop their semantic language by associating consistent "meanings" with specific sequences of language sounds (Chaer, 2003:194).

The field of semantics involves a child's ability to understand the utterances of their interlocutors, including their ability to comprehend the meanings of words spoken by their interlocutors. Starting from the age of two, children can already understand some vocabulary spoken by their interlocutors. One group of vocabulary that children master is object words, especially those related to their environment. However, when a child uses utterances with correct forms, it does not necessarily mean that they have fully mastered their first language, as they may still give different meanings to the sentences they utter. On the other hand, sometimes a child already understands the meaning of a word but pronounces it differently or not in accordance with the actual vocabulary.

Pioneers of universal language, such as Greenberg (1963), studied numerous languages and identified features present in all languages, features found in most languages, and features found only in some languages. Thus, the concept of universal language is not absolute but relative. According to Chomsky (in Dardjowidjojo 2010:232), if an entity contains certain inherent elements, then those elements must exist within that entity, regardless of its location. Chomsky distinguishes between two types of universals: substantive universals and formal universals. Substantive universals encompass the elements or components that form a language, such as every language having nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Universal formal is related to the way the substantive elements are organized. The organization of these elements varies from one language to another. When a child is born, they already have Universal Grammar (UG). Every child has a module or set of basic principles that appear simple in their minds but become complex when interacting with other principles and modules. This study utilizes Chomsky's theory, particularly substantive universals, to explore how 2-year-old children acquire language in the form of nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a qualitative descriptive research. The research design aims to provide insights into how 2-year-old children in Kampung Baru acquire semantic language skills, particularly universal substantives. The findings may offer implications for early childhood education strategies and shed light on

the influence of local culture on linguistic development. The case study design allows for a rich exploration of language acquisition in a specific community, contributing to the broader understanding of child development. The data in this study consists of the acquisition of word variations reflecting the semantic language acquisition of nouns, verbs, and adjectives, with the data source being the speech of 2-year-old children in Kampung Baru. The data collection method used in this research is participant observation, complemented by recording, note-taking, and interviews. The researcher observes and records the speech of each 2-year-old child in Kampung Baru, noting the words related to the research objectives. In this case, the researcher selected 2-year-old children who demonstrated enthusiasm and courage in speaking, expressing themselves, and conveying their ideas. Additionally, the researcher actively engaged with several 2-year-old children in Kampung Baru. Subsequently, the researcher recorded the names of some children and conducted interviews with their parents. Hence, the researcher chose Naura as the subject of study in this research.

Besides, the researcher conducts interviews with the families of 2-year-old children in Kampung Baru, specifically focusing on nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Furthermore, the researcher utilizes a reflective inspector method, where the researcher is part of the speech community that has long been observing and studying the language of 2-year-old children. Once the data is collected, the researcher transcribes the speech data into written form. Afterward, the researcher performs data reduction, classification, and validation based on their types. In the data analysis stage, the researcher employs semantic theory to explore the influence of language acquisition, accuracy of pronunciation, and types of nonverbal communication, such as 1) expressing objects through gestures when related to nouns; 2) indicating actions when related to verbs; and 3) displaying attitudes and facial expressions when related to adjectives. After analyzing the data, the researcher performed data reduction, data classification, data verification, and interpretation. The data were reduced by eliminating less relevant information. Subsequently, the researcher classified the data based on their types, namely nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Following this, data verification was conducted to ensure the

validity of the organized data. Finally, the researcher provided interpretations of the data based on their contextual significance.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION RESULTS

From a semantic perspective, Naura, who is only 2 years old, is already capable of speaking and understanding the meaning of her interlocutor's speech. Although sometimes the words she utters may be imperfect, she is able to distinguish between different objects. In this regard, Naura sometimes produces one-word utterances, while other times she forms complete sentences. Here are some examples of Naura's utterances. In this regard, there are several words that Naura has mastered, including nouns, verbs, and adjectives, both monosyllabic and polysyllabic ones. Here are some words with single and multiple syllables that Naura has already acquired.

1. One-word sentences

- 1) *Acan* = *Kacang* (peanut)
- 2) *Bebek* = *Bebek* (duck)
- 3) *Adoh* = *Jauh* (far)
- 4) *Sate* = *Ate* (satay)
- 5) *Rokok* (cigarette)
- 6) *Rambut* (hair)
- 7) *Aipet* (HP)
- 8) *Endot* = *telur* (egg)
- 9) *Uul* = a person's name

2. Sentences with more than one word

- 1) *Naura udah mandi* = Naura sudah mandi
- 2) *Bapak Naura* = Naura's father
- 3) *Umi aya* (Mother is here)
- 4) *Ayo dek Ubi* = Let's go, little sibling Yubi
- 5) *Awas Acan* = Watch out, peanut
- 6) *Hallo Eddi* = Hello, Jeddi
- 7) *Ali dhuson* = Ali is angry
- 8) *Naura udah mandi* = Naura has taken a bath

Universal substantive language acquisition includes elements that form language, such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Naura has shown the ability to utter words ranging from one-word sentences to simple sentences. The types of words she is familiar with or commonly utters are as follows:

DISCUSSION

This study will discuss the acquisition of semantic vocabulary in Naura, which includes nouns, verbs, and adjectives. Furthermore, it will also explore how Naura expresses and conveys these words along with her expressions.

Nominal Acquisition

In terms of noun acquisition, Naura can name her mother, brother, duck, peanut, satay, cigarette, HP (referring to a smartphone), and egg. When the researcher observed Naura holding a phone and looking at a picture with her mother, Naura was able to respond to the picture she saw. In the phone, there was a picture of a duck and her friend named Yubi. Naura reacted by indicating that there was a photo of Yubi and a duck in the phone. However, there are some nouns that Naura still pronounces imperfectly. For example:

1. In the word *Kacang* (peanut), Naura still pronounces it as *Acan*. Despite not pronouncing it perfectly, she understands that it refers to a type of food.
2. In the word *Sate* (satay), Naura is able to differentiate that it is an edible item.
3. In the word *Rokok* (cigarette), Naura understands its purpose and function as she does not consume it and often gives it to her father. She distinguishes that *Rokok* is for her father, not her mother.
4. In the word *Aipet* (HP), Naura understands its function and purpose as whenever she wants to see pictures or videos, she asks for the *Aipet* (referring to a large smartphone).

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that Naura's acquisition of universal substantive language skills is becoming evident. At the age of 2, Naura is able to understand, differentiate, and utter familiar objects during communication.

Verbal Acquisition

In terms of verb acquisition, Naura can clearly and accurately utter words, phrases, and sentences such as *apa ini?* (what is this?), *pindah* (move), *jauh* (far), *beli-beli* (buy something), and *ayo adik Yubi* (let's go, little sibling Yubi). Here are some observations:

1. Naura expresses her curiosity about things around her by asking *anu apa?* (what is this?). She tries to find out about something by asking people

- around her, such as her mother, father, and friends.
2. In the word *pindah* (move), Naura signals when someone steps on her food or belongings, telling them to move by saying “ngalle” (move).
 3. In the word *jauh* (far), Naura often uses it in response to someone asking, *di mana kompomu?* (where is your toy?). Naura spontaneously responds with *adoh* to indicate the distance between her current position and the location of her toy.
 4. In the phrase *beli-beli* (buy-buy), Naura uses it when inviting her siblings to go shopping, for example, saying *ayo entar melle camilan* (let’s go later to buy snacks). From this phrase, Naura conveys the intention to buy something.
 5. In the phrase *ayo dek Ubi* (let’s go, little sibling Yubi), Naura invites her sibling named Yubi to play together.

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that 2-year-old children already have the ability to use verbs in their speech, followed by actions that correspond to their intentions. Sometimes, young children can even directly act upon the person they are communicating with without using words. This shows that children have started to make requests or respond with actions when they want something to be done.

Adjective Acquisition

In terms of adjective acquisition, Naura is able to mention adjectives such as *cantik* (beautiful), *bau* (smelly), *marah* (angry), *rambut* (hair), Uul (a name), and *adek* (sibling). Here are some observations:

1. In adjective acquisition, Naura can mention adjectives like *bau* but pronounces it as *mambu*. Furthermore, when Naura is holding something dirty and someone around her says it smells, she automatically throws away the object and covers her nose. This shows that Naura understands the meaning of *bau* (smell).
2. In the word *marah* (angry), which is usually pronounced as *dhuson*, Naura can understand when someone is angry, and she is able to say *dhuson* to someone who is angry.
3. Regarding the word *rambut* (hair), Naura understands that the adjective *hitam* (black) is mistakenly associated with hair.

4. In the words Uul and *adek*, Naura understands that *adek* means small or younger, while Uul refers to her older sibling. *Mudah* (easy) and *adek* here are interpreted as derivatives of the word *kecil* (small).

In the acquisition of adjectives, Naura is able to provide descriptions of the characteristics, shapes, sizes, and colors of people or objects. This is because Naura frequently interacts and imitates what people around her say. Based on the data, it can be concluded that at the age of 2, children experience rapid growth in word acquisition and begin to understand and comprehend what others say and do through actions. Therefore, it is important for us to provide understanding in terms of word usage, which will be spoken and imitated by children, especially influenced by environmental factors. Children tend to imitate what they hear, as even at the age of 2, they already understand the words of others well.

This language acquisition process will develop creativity in each child as they listen, understand, and imitate what they comprehend. In addition to using nouns and verbs, children often use adjectives as they directly relate them to the actions they perform. For example, if a child knows that an object is a *sapu* (broom), they will take the broom and immediately start sweeping. This also falls into the category of universal adjectives. Most children always imitate what adults do. Therefore, parents should provide good understanding and words so that children can acquire good understanding in speaking and word acquisition.

In conclusion, at the age of 2, children are able to utter words related to universal objects with clear pronunciation. Around the age of 1 year and 6 months, children start to understand what is done and heard. This understanding has a positive impact on their development. When children begin to understand what is done, language acquisition will further improve. Therefore, when children reach the age of 2, they are capable of mastering language or words well and understanding the meaning of what is spoken and heard. This is a positive response because when children understand, they can provide understanding about what they want to do and do it well.

IV. CONCLUSION

From a semantic perspective, Naura, who is only 2 years old, is already capable of

speaking and understanding the meaning of her interlocutor's speech. Although sometimes the words she utters may be imperfect, she is able to distinguish between different objects. In this regard, Naura sometimes produces one-word utterances, while other times she forms complete sentences. At the age of 2, Naura can acquire sentences consisting of one or more words through semantic language acquisition in the context of universal substantiation. These sentences encompass nouns, verbs, and adjectives. However, in terms of semantics, there are sometimes deviations in meaning, where the words spoken by 2-year-old children do not always correspond to their actual meanings. However, there are also situations where children are able to utter words with the correct meanings. Therefore, when communicating with 2-year-old children, they are already capable of understanding and comprehending what they intend to do.

This study has implications in developing speaking, listening, comprehending, and speaking skills in 2-year-old children. Methods that can be applied include involving children in their surroundings, teaching and engaging them in conversation, and others. Further research is needed, not only on semantic language acquisition in universal substantives but also on the acquisition of morphology, syntax, and pragmatics. This study delves into understanding semantic language skills in 2-year-old children, particularly focusing on universal substantive acquisition. It sheds light on how children at this early stage grasp core language concepts, influenced by local culture and environment. The research's implications extend to aiding educators in designing effective teaching methods, addressing language acquisition issues, and raising awareness about the value of preserving local language and culture. Additionally, it paves the way for further research on diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, offering insights into language development. The study's community-based data can shape educational policies and community empowerment, highlighting its potential to enrich early language acquisition and social interaction among children in their local context.

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