



The Concept of Bilingualism and Its Impact towards Child Language Development

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Abstract

This study aimed to show a deeper understanding of the world of bilingualism and its impact on child language development. In this study, the researcher used library research to explore the complexities of language acquisition, the various forms of bilingualism, and the stages of child language development. In short, bilingualism is crucial in shaping how children develop their language skills. Understanding these aspects is essential for addressing the linguistic and cultural implications of this fascinating aspect of human development. Future research in this field promises to offer more valuable insights into how bilingualism globally influences children's language development.

Keywords: *Bilingualism, Children Language Development, Language Acquisition*

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INTRODUCTION

Language skills are among the fundamental abilities inherent in every human being from birth. Their linguistic journey begins when a child can hear, speak, see, and imitate. Language skills develop along with the child's growth and development; one of the developments is the language acquisition process. According to Facke (2014), language acquisition refers to the progression by which individuals learn a language, with a primary emphasis on its utility as a means of communication, without the role of grammar within the language structure. This process consists of two distinct categories: first-language acquisition and second-language acquisition.

First language acquisition is when a child acquires their native language, starting in early childhood. On the other hand, second language acquisition is the acquisition of additional languages beyond the individual's first language, typically occurring in older children or adults. Both forms of language acquisition play crucial roles in language teaching and provide valuable insights into the broader domain of language learning (Marzuki, 2012).

Within the context of language acquisition, second language acquisition, as one of its types, is closely intertwined with the concept of bilingualism. Bilingualism is an individual's ability to

communicate using two or more languages (Wallner, 2016). This concept takes on particular relevance in a country as diverse as Indonesia, with its diversity in languages and dialects.

In Indonesia, the educational system mandates learning specific languages from elementary school through high school, primarily focusing on Indonesian and English. However, some children may also have the opportunity to study their local language, Chinese, Deutsch, or Arabic. Beyond the classroom, children frequently encounter additional languages within their immediate surroundings. For example, a child growing up in a Javanese-speaking community may need to switch to Indonesian or English when attending school. As such, bilingualism has become familiar and included in Indonesian children's lives.

Bilingualism has influenced child language development in line with the explanation of language acquisition. Therefore, this study aims to dig into a deeper understanding of this situation, examining the concept of bilingualism and its impact on child language development. This investigation will draw upon the insights of experts, explaining the contributing factors to bilingualism and assessing the impacts of bilingualism on child language development.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher employed a library research design to comprehensively gather and analyze existing documents and literature related to the concept of bilingualism and its impacts on child language development as Adlini et al. (2022) stated that library research is a method that involves collecting data by gathering the theoretical foundations that are found in the relevant literature. In the data collection process, the researcher utilized the documentation method, which extensively searched books, journal articles, previous theses, and other references related to bilingualism and its impacts on child language development. These sources were selected based on relevance, encompassing essential information, methodology, findings/discussion, and recommendations.

Furthermore, the researcher employed thematic analysis to explore commonalities, thematic patterns, and key findings across the collected references. The utilization of thematic analysis facilitated the identification of all of the themes and patterns within the literature, allowing for a deeper understanding of the subject matter. The primary objective of this library research was to provide an in-depth exploration, meaningful conclusions, and the identification of potential research for future investigations. In short, the study aimed to offer a comprehensive explanation and understanding of bilingualism and its impacts on child language development.

DISCUSSION

The Concept of Language Acquisition

Language acquisition is a complex aspect of human development that plays a crucial role in our ability to communicate with the world around us. It is not an inherited trait passed down through generations but rather an unconscious process that happens from the inherent capacity of ordinary individuals to acquire and utilize language (Chinyere, 2022). The language acquisition can be categorized into two main types. They are first language acquisition (L1) and second language acquisition (L2). The primary distinction between these two lies in the timing and process of acquiring the language (Derakhshan, 2015).

L1 acquisition begins at birth and is characterized by infants' efforts to hear, speak, see, and imitate when immersed in their native language environment. In contrast, L2 acquisition builds upon L1 proficiency and typically commences around the age of three or later. It consists of a

transfer of information or the language structure from the native language (L1) to the new language (L2), which can lead to errors due to differences in grammar and structure (Derakhshan, 2015).

To understand language acquisition deeper, it is essential to explore the four prevalent theories related to child language development: behaviorist theory, cognitive theory, nativist theory, and interactionist theory. Each theory pictures unique beliefs regarding language acquisition processes, particularly in children.

The behaviorist theory, pioneered by B. F. Skinner, asserts that language development is a learned behavior resulting from rewards and punishments. According to this theory, children can acquire language by imitating the speech they hear in their environment (Shalabi, 2018). Behaviorists argue that children can sound like adults by age three, thanks to their early ability to mimic language (Kasman et al., 2014). In this view, the social context is crucial in helping children's language development.

On the other hand, cognitive theory proposes that children learn language through their innate cognitive abilities. It suggests that children naturally progress through four developmental stages—sensorimotor intelligence, preoperational thinking, concrete operational thinking, and formal operational thinking—encompassing language development as one of their cognitive tasks (Piaget, 1971, as cited in Shalabi, 2018). This theory highlights that each child may have a unique timeline for progressing through these stages, but language development is integral to their cognitive growth.

Nativist theory takes a different perspective by asserting that language acquisition is an innate biological process not significantly influenced by environmental stimuli. According to this view, children are born with a linguistic structure encompassing semantic, syntactic, and phonological elements (Kasman et al., 2014). Nativists argue that children can speak like adults around three, primarily due to their intrinsic linguistic capabilities.

The interactionist theory, introduced by Vygotsky, integrates elements of behaviourism and cognitive theory. It emphasizes the critical role of society and parents in shaping a child's language acquisition process. In this view, the community and caregivers are meaningful stakeholders who influence a child's linguistic development through interactions and guidance (Shalabi, 2018). The interactionist theory recognizes the environment's significance while also acknowledging the innate cognitive abilities of children.

In conclusion, the diverse language acquisition theories offer unique perspectives on developing L1 and L2. They highlight the influences of behavior, environment, and inherent cognitive abilities on language acquisition, shedding light on how children master multiple languages, as observed in places like Indonesia. The intricate interplay of these factors contributes to the phenomenon of bilingualism and shapes the rich tapestry of language acquisition and development.

The Concept of Bilingualism

Based on an individual who uses one language is called a "monolingual". Otherwise, a person who can communicate and use two languages besides his/her mother tongue is called a "bilingual."

According to Pransiska (2020), bilingualism can be defined as the ability of an individual to acquire and communicate by using two or more languages with different language systems besides their native language. These language systems encompass various components, including lexicon, phonology, morphology, and syntax (Setiawan, 2023). For example, people who can only express

themselves in another language using simple terms like "yes" and "no" cannot be considered genuine bilingual.

The bilingualism phenomenon started in the 17th century when the immigration era happened widely in Europe and the US. Furthermore, in 1664, the US society used around 18 languages besides Indiana Language. Establishing the German-English bilingual school in Philadelphia in 1694 marked a significant milestone (Garrido & Alvarez, 2011). This institution set the precedent for creating similar bilingual schools across the country, where European languages were integrated with English. Immigrant Europeans were motivated to preserve their native languages and cultures in the new land where they intended to settle permanently.

In Indonesia, bilingualism has a distinct history, with individuals using two languages daily: their local dialect and the national Indonesian language. Additionally, English began to be taught in schools in 2003. Implementing English in the educational system sparked debates, as discussed by Abduh and Rosmaladewi (2019). Indonesia has improved its educational system and still makes the Indonesian language its national language, cultivates its local language, and teaches many new languages but focuses more on English.

In line with the explanation of bilingualism, bilinguals (people who speak two different languages) are divided into early and Late Bilinguals (Moradi, 2014). Early bilingualism happens when a baby is born with a different parent of origin, or the parents speak different languages. In such cases, the child is naturally influenced by both languages, making them an early bilingual. Late bilingualism, on the other hand, describes individuals who acquire bilingualism during their teenage years. The cognitive theory of language acquisition suggests that acquiring a new language becomes more challenging after childhood.

Early bilinguals are also divided into three types: simultaneous bilingual, receptive bilingual, and sequential bilingual. As stated in Moradi (2014), simultaneous bilingualism occurs when an individual is born into a bilingual family; it creates a strong bilingualism phenomenon. Conversely, receptive bilingualism is also called passive bilingualism (Sherkina-Lieber, Perez-Leroux, & Johns, 2011). A receptive bilingual is an individual who faces a situation where he/she is fluent in L1 but only demonstrates receptive competence in L2. Sequential bilinguals are fluent in their L1 and have enough proficiency to learn and use an L2, often observed in adults seeking to acquire new language skills.

In summary, bilingualism is a multifaceted phenomenon with historical roots dating back to significant immigration waves and cultural preservation efforts. Bilingual individuals can be categorized based on when and how they acquire their second language, leading to distinct types such as early bilinguals (simultaneous, receptive, and sequential) and late bilinguals. Understanding the various facets of bilingualism is crucial for addressing its linguistic and cultural implications.

The Child Language Development

Child development is a systematic and age-dependent process, which includes language development as a fundamental aspect. The journey of language development begins at birth, and it is essential to note that infants do not immediately utter complex words or sentences like adults (Wilymafidini, 2018). Instead, language development in children occurs in distinct stages, from infancy to around eight years of age. This progression is a natural process influenced by various environmental factors.

However, it is worth mentioning that not all children follow the same trajectory in language development due to biological variations. Some may experience language delays or disorders

(Schirmer, Fontura, & Nunes, 2004). Language delay refers to a condition where a child's language or oral expression lags behind the development level of their peers. In contrast, language disorders encompass issues related to conveying information. They can manifest in various ways, including grammatical or structural problems (syntax and morphology), semantic challenges (meaning), or other language aspects (Ismail, 2021).

The standard process of child language development is underpinned by several linguistic components (Jalongo, 1992, as cited in Zubaidah, 2004). In Phonology development, children make the perfect system of sound. Additionally, children will develop their syntax or grammatical system, which helps them produce sound. Moreover, children will have the ability to give meaning or semantics. Furthermore, the social system of their language (pragmatic) allows the children to communicate perfectly with their social life.

According to Dworetzky (1990), human language development comprises two distinct phases: the prelinguistic and linguistic periods. Here is an explanation of these two phases:

1. Prelinguistic Period

The prelinguistic period represents a child's early language development phase before they fully understand how to communicate. This phase encompasses several systematic stages, beginning as early as the second month of a child's life.

- a. In the second month, infants enter the phonation stage, where they start producing sounds resembling quasi vowels, akin to vocal sounds in language.
- b. Babies progress to the cooing stage between the second and fourth months, where they utter word-like combinations of vocal and consonant sounds.
- c. They enter the expansion stage from the fourth to the seventh month, producing new sounds.
- d. The babbling stage follows, occurring from the seventh to the tenth month, where babies produce more complex syllables like "baba" or "mamama," even though the sounds lack specific meaning.
- e. The contraction stage, which follows the babbling stage (usually between the tenth and fourteenth months), involves a reduction in the use of phonemes, along with the development of intonation and language rhythm. Infants must hear and imitate the sounds of the language they are exposed to before reaching the contraction stage.

2. Linguistic Period

The term "infants" from Latin, meaning "without speech," refers to infants. Babies develop language skills during this period and connect words with concrete objects or actions before grasping abstract concepts. This phase unfolds from the tenth to the seventeenth month and encompasses various stages:

- a. Around the twelfth month, children use holophrases, single words or phrases that convey complete thoughts.
- b. From the twelfth to the eighteenth month, they begin incorporating more complex nouns and acquire a vocabulary of around 3 to 50 words.
- c. In the second to third year of life, children transition to telegraphic language, using 2-3 words in their communications.
- d. By the third year, their vocabulary expands to 200-300 words.
- e. In the fourth year, children refine pronunciation and grammar in their sentences, with a vocabulary of 1400-1600 words.

- f. During the fifth and sixth years, children construct sentences with proper grammar, averaging 6-8 words per sentence and acquiring a vocabulary of over 2500 words, with an understanding of around 6000 words.

In conclusion, child language development is a multifaceted process involving distinct stages, and variations in this progression can lead to language delays or disorders. Understanding the intricacies of these stages and their components is crucial for assessing and facilitating a child's linguistic development.

The Impacts of Bilingualism towards Child Language Development

Bilingualism is a common situation that many children often encounter due to the effects of globalization, where learning multiple languages has become more accessible. Many sources and accessible language education make learning a new language more manageable for children or adults. Additionally, bilingualism is about an individual's ability to speak two or more languages fluently and relate to the culture and social context. In conclusion, bilingualism is a common situation that we can find everywhere.

Due to the typical situation, bilingualism might have influenced language development, especially for children. The effects of bilingualism are rooted in the experience children undergo.

In terms of its impacts, bilingualism offers numerous benefits for children's language development. Several previous studies, such as those cited by Byers-Heinlein and Lew-Williams (2013), highlight the linguistic advantages of bilingualism. Children who master more than one language can better understand other languages, enhancing their communication skills and facilitating cultural connections. Additionally, Yow and Markman (2011) suggest that early bilingual children exhibit heightened sensitivity to various communication features, including voice tone. In short, bilingualism has a lot of positive impacts on children's language development due to its function of connecting the social context and the language context of the children.

Furthermore, many people think that bilingualism might confuse children about the language they use. However, the phenomenon of code-mixing, where children blend languages due to a lack of vocabulary in one language, is not a sign of confusion. On the contrary, it reflects the natural evolution of children's language development. They display the courage to switch between languages without feeling confused as they communicate their intended communication (Lanza, 2004). In conclusion, the frequent occurrence of bilingualism among children does not indicate confusion; instead, it underscores their creative use of language.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this article has studied the concept of bilingualism and its influence on children's language development. Language acquisition, both first language acquisition (L1) and second language acquisition (L2) plays an essential role in a child's linguistic journey. Various language acquisition theories, including behaviorist, cognitive, nativist, and interactional theories, explain how children master various languages.

Bilingualism, a phenomenon with special meaning in countries with a religious culture like Indonesia, is defined by a person's ability to communicate effectively using one or more languages. It has historical roots and is influenced by the type of bilingualism, whether early or late, and specific subcategories in early bilingualism, such as simultaneous, receptive, and sequential bilingualism.

Child language development is a natural, age-dependent process that begins at birth and progresses through distinct stages. The prelinguistic and linguistic periods are marked by a child's

increasing ability to communicate and understand language, with variations that may result in language delays or disorders.

Bilingualism has both positive and constructive impacts on child language development. This increases linguistic and cultural understanding, improves communication skills, and does not create confusion. Rather, it demonstrates the creative use of language by children who switch between languages fluently as needed.

In summary, bilingualism significantly influences children's language development, and understanding the intricacies of language acquisition, types of bilingualism, and stages of children's language development is essential to addressing the linguistic and cultural implications of this complex and exciting aspect—human development. Future research in this area will undoubtedly continue to provide valuable insights into how bilingualism shapes the linguistic landscape of children worldwide.

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