

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is used as the introductory of the present study. The chapter is divided into several subchapters, namely background of the study, research questions, aims of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, research methodology, clarification of related terms, organization of the paper, and concluding remarks.

1.1 Background of the Study

Globalization era has made people tend to learn on their second or another language(s), one of them is English. English acts as an international language used by people or different nations to communicate with one another. As one of the developing countries, Indonesia requires its people to learn and to be fluent in English therefore they can improve their personal quality as well as the support for progressing Indonesian quality to face globalization.

Globalization has made English as the main subject which must be taught in schools. Indonesian government confirms that English as one of the subjects in the Elementary School to the Senior High School as Competency Standards for School Approval. Additionally, the students must master their English competence. According to Pusat Data dan Statistik Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (2016), English is one of the subjects of National Exam which is needed to be graduated from the Junior High School and the Senior High School. It is a standard evaluation system to measure students' competence in achieving standard score, referred to *Standar Kompetensi Lulusan (SKL)*.

Nevertheless, Field (2003, p. 23) stated that English is a type of opaque orthography - consists of sounds which are not coherent with its alphabets. He described that "English contains a mixture of: a) words that can be spelt using

GPC rules (e.g. canteen), b) words where the weak phoneme /ə/ is represented by any one of the five vowels, c) words that can be spelt by analogy with other words (e.g. light, rough), d) and words that are unique in their spellings (e.g. yacht, buoy).” Thus, English gives a less clear view on a mixed alphabetic system so it has made a gap for students in extracting the GPC rules and may not have been explicitly taught the relevant rules in the expose of alphabets and sounds. By this, students who learn English have difficulties in acquiring the language in term of pronunciation and spelling (Spencer, 2007; Yilmaz, 2014).

Indonesian students have the capacity to learn foreign languages and who are as English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners. According to Carroll (1981 cited in Harley, 2005), there are four variation sources to learn a new language: phonetic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, rote-learning ability, and inductive learning ability. Phonetic coding ability is the ability to identify new sounds and form associations between them. Then by grammatical sensitivity is the ability to recognize the grammatical functions of words and other syntactic structures, and lastly, inductive learning ability is the ability to infer rules from data (Harley, 2005).

This study focuses to one of the aspects of phonetic coding ability, namely phonological awareness. Phonological awareness lets language learners identify and distinguish sounds in a word. There are two dimensions of phonological awareness according to Yopp and Yopp (2009): *sound units* and *type of manipulation of the sound units*. The first dimension is the *sound units*, including syllables, onset-rime units, and phoneme. The second dimension is the *type of manipulation of the sound units*. *Type of manipulation of the sound units* are categorized as follows: sound matching, sound isolation, sound blending, sound adding or substitution, and phoneme segmentation (Yopp, 1992).

Previous studies conducted by researchers who correlate phonological and phonemic awareness with language aspects, and one of them is Hecht and Close

(2002) stated that testing spelling skills and training kindergartners' phonemic awareness and found that individual differences varied the treatment and the result in posttest levels of phonemic awareness and spelling. Sonnenschein and Munsterman's (2002) study, also focusing on collaboration in reading development, reading motivation, and phonological awareness to access print and sound word from 5-year-old children. Their study showed that children's result in the effective quality of reading interaction towards literacy. Melby-Lervåg, Lyster, and Hulme (2012) also measured phonemic skills in children at the earliest stages of learning to read was closely related to the early growth in children's word reading skills and this effect remained reliable towards both verbal short-term memory and rime awareness. All these studies agreed that phonological awareness as a bridge of a critical gap to prepare for literacy learning and success in reading at the early stage of language development (Goldenberg, et al., 2014).

On the other hand, lacks of phonological awareness can decline the language development of a child. Kame'enui's (1997 cited in Yilmaz, 2014) study reported that children who lacked phonemic awareness skills could not: a) group words with similar and dissimilar sounds (mat, mug, sun), b) blend and split syllables (f o o t), c) blend sounds into words (m_a_n), d) segment a word as a sequence of sounds (e.g., fish is made up of three phonemes, /f/, /i/, /sh/), and e) detect and manipulate sounds within words (change "r" in "run" to "s" to make "sun"). Although lacks of phonological awareness correlate with difficulties in reading skill, these lacks are not necessarily as a disability for children to develop their linguistic skills (Fletcher et al., 1994 cited in Chard & Dickson, 1999).

From the previous statements, it shows that Indonesian students are able to learn foreign languages through phonological awareness. However, learning the foreign languages means to build up new system habits and overcome the bias of the first language. Wieden and Nemser (1991 cited in Cook, 2008) stated that

learners went through three stages: 1) *presystemic*, 2) *transfer*, and 3) *approximative*.

Cross-Linguistic Influence (CLI) is a term that studies phenomena in “*transfer, interference, avoidance, borrowing, and L2-related aspects of language loss*” (Sharwood Smith & Kellerman, 1986 cited in Cenoz, Hufeisen, & Jessner, 2001, p. 1). Furthermore, CLI studies have detected some factors influencing the acquisition of foreign languages, such as language distance, proficiency level of target language and source language, recency of use, length of residence and exposure to a non-native language environment, order of acquisition, and formality of context (De Angelis, 2007 cited in Duhalde Solís & Capdevila i Batet, 2015). This study focuses on two factors, namely the chronological order of acquisition and language proficiency. The first factor is the chronological order of acquisition stated that where L1, L2, L3 are distinguished and not useful to give term in multilingual proficiency, so the Dynamic Model of Multilingual (DMM) uses the terms ‘primary’, ‘secondary’, and ‘tertiary’ language systems in a discussion of the development of multilingual system (Hufeisen, 2000b cited in Cook, 2003). The second factor is language proficiency. Major factors influencing language proficiency of ESL students are active exposure to the language through individual outside reading, exposure to teachers who are native speakers of English, the use of English as a language of instruction, and participation in intensive English programs (Gradman & Hanania, 1991).

To sum up, phonological systems play a major role in learning to read words, sentences, and paragraphs in a particular language. They refer to the sound in a language’s processing of reading and speaking. A successful acquisition in phonological representation helps language learners to be proficient in acquiring the language. Additionally, several factors that can influence the performance to acquire a language.

The researcher focuses on a descriptive study on English phonological awareness of first grade students at an Elementary School in Northern Bandung. The purpose of choosing the first grade at an Elementary School is a follow up to Mazka's (2014) study which investigates students' performance in phonological awareness in a different language context. First grade students are around six to seven years old, in this study only 18 students are taken as the data sampling. A particular class is selected with assistance and suggestion from the first grade English teacher. Based on the age, it is categorized as *middle childhood* according to lifespan perspective (Berk, 2007). Children's language development shifts where they undergo language awareness.

From previous explanations, the researcher wants to fill in the gap to learner's language competence, especially in phonology. Language competence in phonology is the main focus because from language, a child acquires spoken language first rather than written language. Furthermore, this study explains and assesses how well first grade students' English phonological awareness is and the factors influencing English phonological awareness.

1.2 Research Questions

This study focuses on describing children's English phonological awareness in six subtests on phonological awareness (adapted from Adams, Foorman, Lundberg, & Beeler, 1998), namely detecting rhymes, counting syllables, matching initial sounds, counting phonemes, comparing word lengths, and representing phonemes with letters.

The six subtests are categorized according to a dimension of phonological awareness, *sound units* (Yopp & Yopp, 2009). *Sound units* dimension is generally from larger to smaller units of sound. Then, this study also describes the factors influencing English phonological awareness. Thus to fulfill the aim of the present study, there are two main questions based on the explanation above to underlie the present study as following:

1. What is the English phonological awareness of first grade students at an Elementary School in Northern Bandung?
2. What factors affect English phonological awareness?

1.3 Aims of the Study

This study focuses on two main questions that are reflected from the answer of the assessment test, the questionnaire, and the interview in the *findings* and *discussion*. The aims of the present study are to describe and assess:

1. English phonological awareness of first grade students that is classified into a dimension of phonological awareness, namely *sound units*.
2. Identifying all factors which effect to English phonological awareness, such as the chronological order of acquisition and language proficiency.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on describing and assessing students' English phonological awareness and factors influencing English phonological awareness. The participants are the Indonesian first grade students who are categorized as English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners, students' parents, and teachers in the Elementary School.

The data which are used as follows: the assessment test, the questionnaire, and the interview. The assessment test uses English as the tested language to explore children's English phonological awareness. However, the language used in the instructions of each subtest is in Indonesian therefore the students can understand all the instructions well. Furthermore, the context of the assessment test is limited with a consideration to minimalize the gap of the unknown materials that are not yet studied in the classroom. Then, parents' questionnaire and teacher's interview also are written in Indonesian, so the participants can understand each statement well.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Studies on children's language development are important. This study has practical and theoretical benefit. The practical benefit of the present study is to give contribution to the parents for knowing their children's language development in English language learning, especially children who are exposed to two or more languages in the community. It is also to improve children's metalinguistic knowledge and awareness to differentiate English sounds to its alphabets.

The theoretical benefit of the present study is to give a contribution to children's language development in the area of psycholinguistics. In addition, the present study is expected to get the answer about the gap on students' performance in English phonological awareness and the factors influencing English phonological awareness.

1.6 Research Methodology

1.6.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed method design. A mixed method design is used when all methods have bias and weaknesses of an idea, and the collection of quantitative and qualitative data neutralize the weaknesses of each form data (Jick, 1979 cited in Creswell, 2014). Moreover, Creswell (2014) added that a mixed method design allows a researcher to use multiple forms of data drawing on all possibilities in quantitative and qualitative methods. Thus, statistical and text analyses are needed to evaluate the databases interpretation.

This study uses the model of an explanatory sequential mixed method. With this model, the researcher conducts a quantitative research, analyzes the result and then builds on the results to explain them in more detail with a qualitative research (Creswell, 2014).

1.6.2 Participants of the Study

Participants of this study are a particular class of the first grade at an Elementary School in Northern Bandung, consisting 24 students. 18 students are taken as sample with parents' agreement to their child as the participant for this study. Then, parents and teachers are also involved in providing supplementary data which will later help explained the emerging patterns of the children's data.

1.6.3 Data Collection

The assessment test of phonological awareness, the questionnaire, and the interview are used in collecting the data. The assessment test of phonological awareness is used to assess children's ability in identifying sounds. Meanwhile, the questionnaire and interview are also used as supplementary data to explain children's data.

1.6.4 Data Analysis

The assessment test result is the main instrument to collect the quantitative data. The quantitative data are analyzed using SPSS 24 for Windows and presented in form of tables, providing descriptive quantitative results on each subtest. Meanwhile, the questionnaire and interview are used to obtain the qualitative data. Creswell (2014) states that to interpret raw data, the data are analyzed in four steps: organizing and preparing the data analysis, coding the data, describing the data, and interpreting the data. Thus, the questionnaire and interview are presented in form of descriptive explanation to fulfill the qualitative data.

1.7 Clarification of Related Terms

There are some terms which are needed to be clarified to help the readers to understand, as follows:

1. Phonological awareness is the awareness of sounds in a particular language in term of the ability to count syllables, match initial sounds, detect rhymes, and identify phonemes. (Yopp & Yopp, 2009);
2. Language development is the development of production and comprehension of language that varies in human individually (Harley, 2005);
3. First language acquisition is the field that investigates the process of learning a first language (Ortega, 2009);
4. First language or L1 refers to language(s) that a child learns from parents, siblings, and caretakers during critical years of development (from womb up to four years of age) (Ortega, 2009);
5. Second language acquisition is the study that investigates human capacity to learn a second or foreign language (Richards & Schmidt, 2010);
6. Second language or L2 refers to a language that plays a major role that may not be the first language but it is used in a particular country (Richards & Schmidt, 2010);
7. Foreign language is a language that is particularly as a school subject that has a purpose to communicate with foreigners or reading materials in the language (Richards & Schmidt, 2010);
8. The chronological order is the order in which languages learned sequentially (Ortega, 2009);
9. Language proficiency is the level of active exposure to the language through social interaction, exposure to native speaker teachers, language usage as a language instruction, and participation in intensive language programs (Gradman & Hanania, 1991).

1.8 Organization of the Paper

This study is organized into five chapters as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction. The first chapter introduces the background of the present study, research questions, aims of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, research methodology, clarification of related terms, organization of the paper, and concluding remarks.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Foundation. This chapter discusses the relevant theoretical foundation of the present study. It is subdivided into six main parts, namely theories of acquisition, stages of language development, phonological awareness, English phonology, previous related studies, and concluding remarks.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology. This chapter focuses on the methodological aspects of the present study. It covers six main parts: research questions, research design, participants of the study, data collection, data analysis, and concluding remarks.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion. This chapter presents the present findings and discussion of the present study. Four main parts are provided in this chapter: English phonological awareness of first grade students, factors influencing English phonological awareness, discussion, and concluding remarks.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Suggestions. This is the last chapter of the present study and it consists of conclusion and several recommendations for future research and the teachers.

1.9 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented the underlying principles of the study that covers the background of the study, research questions, aims of the study, scope of the study, the significance of the study, research methodology, clarification of related terms,

and organization of the paper. The next chapter, chapter 2, elaborates the relevant theoretical foundation on language development to the present study.