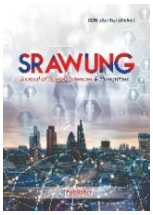

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First Language Acquisition in a Three-Year-Old Child: A Phonological, Morphological, and Syntactic Analysis

Atika Zikri[1*], Siti Ainim Liusti[2], Agustina[3]
[1]tikazii300402@gmail.com,[2]sitiainim@fbs.unp.ac.id, [3]agustina@fbs.unp.ac.id
Universitas Negeri Padang

*Corresponding Author: Atika Zikri
Email: tikazii300402@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the first language acquisition of a three-year-old Indonesian-speaking child at the phonological, morphological, and syntactic levels of linguistic analysis. Despite the considerable body of research on early childhood language development, naturalistic acquisition studies focusing on Indonesian as a first language remain underrepresented in the cross-linguistic literature, leaving a gap in understanding of how developmental patterns documented in widely studied languages manifest in typologically distinct ones. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design, with data collected over three weeks through participatory naturalistic observation within the subject's habitual domestic environment. The research subject was selected through purposive sampling on the basis of age, monolingual Indonesian language background, and absence of documented developmental disorder. Data were analysed following the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal three principal outcomes. At the phonological level, the subject consistently substituted the trill consonant /r/ with the lateral approximant /l/ and the alveolar fricative /s/ with the palatal affricate /c/, patterns that are developmentally normative and consistent with universal consonant acquisition hierarchies. At the morphological level, the subject demonstrated productive use of base lexical forms across multiple word classes, alongside emerging but grammatically incomplete use of verbal prefixes. At the syntactic level, the subject produced all four major sentence types, with declarative sentences occurring most frequently, followed by interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory forms. These findings extend the cross-linguistic evidence base for universalist accounts of early language development and offer practical implications for parents and early childhood educators in supporting children's linguistic growth during this critical developmental period.

Keywords: *Early Childhood, First Language Acquisition, Morphology, Phonology, Syntax*

INTRODUCTION

Language constitutes the primary medium through which human beings communicate, convey ideas, articulate emotions, and negotiate meaning within their social environments (Mailani et al., 2022). As a rule-governed system of symbolic representation, language enables individuals not only to interact with others but also to engage with and adapt to the wider world around them (Kidd & Garcia, 2022). The capacity for language is unique to humans and is regarded as one of the most complex cognitive achievements in human development. The acquisition of language in children unfolds naturally from birth, developing progressively through sustained exposure to communicative interactions within the immediate social environment, without reliance on formal instruction (Chen, 2024). The period from birth to six years of age is widely recognised as a critical window of linguistic development, often referred to as the golden age, during which the neural architecture of the brain exhibits its highest degree of plasticity and receptivity to linguistic input (Visser-Bochane et al., 2020).

First language acquisition is fundamentally distinguished from formal language learning by its spontaneous and largely unconscious character. Rather than following structured instructional sequences, children absorb the phonological, morphological, and syntactic properties of their native language through naturalistic communicative interactions within their home environment (Jo & Sundara, 2026). This process is cumulative and progressive: utterances typically begin as single-word productions and gradually develop into multi-word combinations and grammatically more complex sentences as the child matures (Karadöller et al., 2025). The distinction between acquisition and formal learning carries significant theoretical implications, particularly in framing how early childhood language development should be observed, documented, and supported by parents and educators alike (Chen, 2024).

Several internal and external factors have been shown to shape the trajectory of children's language development. Among the most consistently identified are the child's age, cognitive capacity, physical condition, quality of the home language environment, socioeconomic background, and the richness of caregiver interaction (Anderson et al., 2021; Wang, 2023). By the age of three years, children typically begin to engage in extended conversational exchanges, take turns in dialogue, and produce a variety of sentence types, reflecting a period of particularly rapid linguistic growth (Visser-Bochane et al., 2020). The concurrent maturation of multiple linguistic subsystems at this developmental stage makes it an instructive point of analysis for understanding the broader trajectory of early language development across phonological, morphological, and syntactic domains.

A growing body of empirical research has investigated first language acquisition in young children across different linguistic contexts. Jo and Sundara (2026) examined naturalistic language samples collected from typically developing

three-year-old English-learning children, demonstrating that lexical and grammatical measures could reliably distinguish children with and without language delays even when data were gathered outside controlled laboratory settings. Similarly, Kidd and Garcia (2022), in a large-scale bibliometric review of child language acquisition research, noted that studies involving non-Indo-European languages, including those spoken in Southeast Asia, remain substantially underrepresented in the published literature, thereby limiting the generalisability of existing developmental frameworks. Karadöller et al. (2025) further contributed to this discussion by proposing an integrated multimodal framework that accounts for the simultaneous development of speech, gesture, and grammatical structures in first language acquisition, highlighting the multi-layered nature of children's early linguistic competence. These studies collectively affirm that the age of three years represents a pivotal juncture in language development, warranting close and systematic investigation.

Further studies have examined the specific linguistic subsystems that emerge during early childhood, with particular attention to phonological accuracy, morphological productivity, and syntactic diversity. Anderson et al. (2021), in a large-scale meta-analysis, confirmed that both the quantity and quality of parental linguistic input are significantly associated with children's vocabulary and grammatical development during the preschool years, while Wang (2023) further synthesised evidence indicating that environmental factors, including caregiver responsiveness and socioeconomic conditions, exert sustained influence on early language outcomes. Research focusing specifically on the three-year age range has found that children at this stage have not yet fully mastered all phonemes of their target language, with certain sounds, particularly liquids and fricatives, remaining difficult to produce accurately (Jo & Sundara, 2026). At the morphological level, children at this age demonstrate familiarity with base lexical forms encountered in their daily environment, alongside limited but developing use of derivational and inflectional morphology, while at the syntactic level they are generally capable of producing declarative, imperative, interrogative, and exclamatory sentence structures (Karadöller et al., 2025). Despite this accumulation of evidence, the majority of naturalistic acquisition studies have been conducted on English and other widely studied European languages, leaving a considerable gap in knowledge regarding the developmental patterns of children acquiring typologically distinct languages such as Indonesian.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating the first language acquisition of a three-year-old Indonesian-speaking child named Amir Ahmad Alhasani, residing in Dadok Tunggul Hitam, Padang City, West Sumatra, Indonesia. Amir is the first child of a close family acquaintance of the research team, a circumstance that facilitated naturalistic data collection within his habitual communicative environment and ensured the ecological validity of the data gathered. The study examines Amir's linguistic production across three levels of

analysis, namely phonology, morphology, and syntax, with the aim of providing a detailed, systematic description of his emerging language competence as an Indonesian first language acquirer. Its novelty lies in offering an empirically grounded, multi-level linguistic profile of an Indonesian-speaking child at precisely this critical developmental stage, a contribution that is largely absent from the existing cross-linguistic literature. By documenting these acquisition patterns, the study contributes to the broader understanding of early language development beyond dominant linguistic traditions and offers practical implications for parents, early childhood educators, and practitioners concerned with supporting children's linguistic growth during this foundational period. The broader institutional and educational dimensions of this developmental concern have also been highlighted in recent social sciences scholarship addressing the relationship between educational quality, leadership, and learning outcomes in Southeast Asian contexts (By & Ros, 2024; Soeurn, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Child Language Acquisition

Language acquisition refers to the process by which children naturally develop mastery of their mother tongue, a process that unfolds without deliberate instruction and is deeply intertwined with the child's social development and the formation of social identity (Rima, 2023; Shayla, 2025). Within this broader process, scholars have identified two fundamental dimensions: competence and performance. Competence concerns the unconscious internalisation of grammatical rules, whereas performance relates to the child's ability to comprehend and produce novel utterances in real communicative situations (Chomsky, 1969). These two dimensions operate in parallel throughout early childhood and together constitute the basis upon which a child's communicative capacity is built.

Research has consistently shown that children between the ages of three and four years are capable of producing simple sentences, responding to basic commands, and beginning to employ interrogative forms in their spontaneous speech (Padli & Marselina, 2025; Sari & Ariyanti, 2022; Visser-Bochane et al., 2020). Lovčević (2025) argued that the quality of the home linguistic environment plays a decisive role in shaping the pace and complexity of this development, as caregivers who engage in responsive and varied interaction provide richer linguistic models for the child to internalise. Family interaction in particular constitutes the primary medium through which children at this stage consolidate their emerging phonological, lexical, and grammatical knowledge, given that naturalistic conversational exposure remains the most influential driver of early language growth (Agustina & Manipuspika, 2022; Crespo et al., 2024).

Phonological Level

Phonology is the branch of linguistics concerned with the systematic study of sound patterns in human language (Jakobson & MacMahon, 1969). During the course of phonological acquisition, children do not immediately achieve accurate production of all speech sounds; rather, they follow a developmental sequence that proceeds from simpler to more articulatorily complex phonemes. Jakobson and MacMahon (1969) proposed that the acquisition of phonemic contrasts follows a universal hierarchy, moving from bilabial to dental to palatal to velar consonants. This framework predicts that children will master stop consonants before fricatives, and that they will acquire anterior consonants before posterior ones, a pattern that has since been confirmed across typologically diverse languages.

Subsequent empirical work has elaborated on Jakobson's foundational claims. Alfaifi and Qasem (2024), examining phonological substitution patterns in children acquiring Arabic, documented that liquid phonemes such as /r/ and lateral approximants are among the last sounds to be mastered, frequently replaced by phonemes that are less articulatorily demanding during the early stages of development. These findings align with cross-linguistic evidence demonstrating that fricatives and liquids are universally late-acquired sounds because they require a higher degree of articulatory coordination than stops or nasals (Knežević & Maassen, 2025). Such phoneme substitution processes are considered developmentally normative and are not indicative of disorder, provided they resolve within the expected age range.

Morphological Level

Morphology is the branch of linguistics that examines the internal structure of words, including the processes of affixation, reduplication, and compounding through which new words are formed (Booij, 2007). In young children, morphological acquisition begins with the productive use of base lexical forms encountered in the immediate environment and progresses toward the gradual incorporation of derivational and inflectional morphology. Children between the ages of three and six years have typically acquired a foundational vocabulary that includes nouns, verbs, adjectives, numerals, and pronouns, reflecting the lexical categories most frequently encountered in their daily interactions (Kidd & Garcia, 2022).

Empirical investigations into early morphological development have demonstrated that children's acquisition of morphological forms is strongly tied to the frequency and diversity of lexical input they receive from caregivers and peers. Anderson et al. (2021) confirmed in a meta-analytic synthesis that both the quantity and quality of parental linguistic input are significantly associated with children's morphological and vocabulary development during the preschool years. Furthermore, Shin and Miller (2022) found that base word recognition in young children develops earlier and more robustly than awareness of derivational affixes,

suggesting that morphological acquisition follows a trajectory from semantically transparent to more opaque word structures.

Syntactic Level

Syntax is the branch of linguistics that investigates the structural organisation of sentences and the relationships between their constituent elements (Crystal, 2011). A widely applied classification distinguishes sentences according to their communicative function into four types: declarative sentences, which convey statements; imperative sentences, which express commands or requests; interrogative sentences, which pose questions; and exclamatory sentences, which express strong emotion or emphasis (Moeliono et al., 2015). This typological framework provides a productive basis for describing the range of sentence structures that young children produce in naturalistic speech contexts.

Research into syntactic development during early childhood indicates that children at the three-year stage are already capable of producing all four sentence types, though with varying degrees of structural complexity and grammatical accuracy. Buckalew et al. (2024) demonstrated that maternal use of interrogative structures significantly influences the syntactic development of children aged five to seven years, underscoring the role of interactive conversational input in shaping sentence production abilities. At an earlier developmental stage, Aldyantama and Nuryani (2021) found that two-year-old Indonesian-speaking children predominantly produced imperative sentences, whereas declarative and interrogative structures became more prominent as the children progressed toward the age of three, reflecting the gradual expansion of syntactic repertoire that characterises this critical period of language development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This design was selected because the primary aim of the investigation was to document, describe, and interpret linguistic phenomena as they naturally occurred in the subject's everyday communicative environment (Creswell & Poth, 2024). No experimental manipulation or artificial elicitation was involved in the data collection process. Naturalistic contexts yield more representative evidence of a young child's actual linguistic competence than controlled laboratory conditions, making this approach particularly well-suited to child language acquisition research (Jo & Sundara, 2026). Furthermore, a single-subject case study design was deliberately adopted, as it allows for an in-depth, contextually rich description of individual linguistic behaviour that broader survey-based designs cannot provide, and has been widely recognised as a legitimate and productive methodological choice in qualitative language acquisition research (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

The research subject was selected through purposive sampling on the basis of three explicit criteria (Campbell et al., 2020). First, the child was required to be

three years of age, representing the precise developmental stage under investigation. Second, the subject was required to be a monolingual Indonesian first language acquirer with no documented history of language delay or developmental disorder. Third, the subject was required to reside in a stable domestic environment in which Indonesian served as the exclusive language of daily interaction (Visser-Bochane et al., 2020). On the basis of these criteria, Amir Ahmad Alhasani, a typically developing male child aged three years residing in Dadok Tunggul Hitam, Padang City, West Sumatra, Indonesia, was identified as the most information-rich case available to the research team. The researcher's existing familiarity with the subject's immediate family environment served to reduce observer effect and minimise reactivity. This constitutes a methodological advantage of particular value in naturalistic child language research, where the presence of an unfamiliar observer can suppress or distort a child's spontaneous speech production (Cristia et al., 2023).

Data were collected over a period of three weeks through direct observation within the subject's habitual domestic setting, a duration considered sufficient for obtaining a representative corpus of naturalistic child speech at this developmental stage (Jo & Sundara, 2026). The data collection technique employed was participatory observation, in which the researcher simultaneously observed and engaged in interaction with the child. This approach encouraged varied and spontaneous utterances across different communicative contexts and aligns with the participatory naturalistic observation method advocated in child language research (Cristia et al., 2023). All utterances produced by the subject were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

Each utterance was documented alongside its immediate communicative context in order to preserve interpretive accuracy and contextual integrity throughout the analytical process. A total of 47 analysable utterances were retained following transcription and initial screening, with utterances excluded only where recording quality was insufficient or communicative context was indeterminate. This corpus size is consistent with precedents in qualitative naturalistic child language case studies, where analytical depth and contextual richness are prioritised over quantitative breadth (Cristia et al., 2023).

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2020), comprising three iterative and interconnected stages. The first stage, data condensation, involved the transcription, identification, classification, and interpretation of the child's utterances across three levels of linguistic analysis: phonological, morphological, and syntactic. The second stage, data display, involved the systematic presentation of the analysed data in descriptive narrative and structured tables, enabling clear and accessible reporting of the identified linguistic patterns. The third and final stage, drawing and verifying conclusions, involved the formulation of findings through careful verification against the original data corpus, ensuring that all conclusions remained grounded in the empirical evidence collected (Miles et al., 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Phonological Acquisition

The phonological analysis of the subject's utterances revealed two consistent and systematic patterns of phoneme substitution across the entire data corpus. The trill consonant /r/ was replaced without exception by the lateral approximant /l/, and the alveolar fricative /s/ was replaced by the palatal affricate /c/ in all instances of their occurrence. These substitution patterns are illustrated in Speech Event 1, which is representative of the broader phonological data collected throughout the observation period.

Speech Event 1:

Amir:*"Ami, Amir main cepeda ya, di lual aja."* (Ami, Amir wants to ride the bicycle outside)

Researcher:*"Iya, hati-hati ya Mir, jangan ngebut."* (Yes, be careful Mir, don't go too fas)

Amir:*"Amir balap kak, ayo duduk cini, tutup pintu pagal."* (I am going to race, come sit here and close the gate)

In this exchange, several phoneme substitutions can be identified at the word level. The word *sepeda* (bicycle) is produced as *cepeda*, in which the initial alveolar fricative /s/ is replaced by the palatal affricate /c/. The word *luar* (outside) is produced as *lual*, in which the word-final trill /r/ is replaced by the lateral approximant /l/. The word *sini* (here) is produced as *cini*, again reflecting the /s/ → /c/ substitution at the word-initial position. The word *pagar* (fence) is produced as *pagal*, in which the word-final /r/ is once more realised as /l/. The word *balapan* (racing) is produced correctly as *balap*, suggesting that words in which /r/ does not occur present no articulatory difficulty for the subject. These word-level patterns confirm that the two substitution processes identified are consistent, positionally stable, and not restricted to any single phonological environment, as they occur in both word-initial and word-final positions. Table 1 presents a systematic overview of all phoneme changes observed across the full data corpus.

Table 1 Phoneme Substitutions in the Subject's Spontaneous Speech

No	Target Word	Meaning	Child's Production	Phoneme Change
1.	Sepeda	Bicycle	Cepeda	/s/ → /c/
2.	Luar	Outside	Lual	/r/ → /l/
3.	Sini	Here	Cini	/s/ → /c/
4.	Pagar	Fence	Pagal	/r/ → /l/
5.	Besar	Big	Becal	/s/ → /c/, /r/ → /l/
6.	Sekolah	School	Cekolah	/s/ → /c/

No	Target Word	Meaning	Child's Production	Phoneme Change
7.	Berhitung	To count	Belitung	/r/ → /l/

Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

The case of *besar* (big), produced as *becal*, is particularly noteworthy as it demonstrates the simultaneous application of both substitution processes within a single word, with /s/ → /c/ occurring in the medial position and /r/ → /l/ occurring in the word-final position. This double substitution confirms that the two phonological processes operate independently of one another and are applied consistently whenever the target phoneme is present, regardless of its position within the word or its proximity to other substituted sounds.

The substitution of /r/ with /l/ reflects the considerable articulatory demands of trill consonant production, which requires rapid and precisely coordinated vibration of the tongue tip against the alveolar ridge. This degree of neuromuscular control is not typically achieved by children at the age of three years. The replacement of /s/ with /c/ similarly reflects the difficulty that young children encounter in sustaining the continuous, precisely directed airstream required for fricative production. The affricate /c/ involves a brief complete oral closure followed by a gradual fricative release, making it articulatorily less demanding than the sustained turbulence required to produce the fricative /s/ accurately.

These word-level and phoneme-level findings directly support and extend the cross-linguistic consonant acquisition norms documented by McLeod and Crowe (2018), who confirmed across 27 languages that trill and fricative consonants are among the last phoneme classes to be acquired, with mastery typically not achieved until after the age of five years. The present data are also consistent with Jakobson and MacMahon (1969) foundational universalist framework, which predicts that articulatorily simpler consonants are acquired before more complex ones. Crucially, these findings extend the existing literature by providing naturalistic Indonesian-language evidence for a developmental trajectory that has to date been documented predominantly in Indo-European languages, thereby broadening the cross-linguistic empirical basis for universalist accounts of phonological acquisition.

Morphological Acquisition

At the morphological level, the subject demonstrated productive command of base lexical forms drawn from his immediate daily environment. The vocabulary observed in Amir's speech included nouns such as *sepeda* (bicycle), *mobil* (car), *sekolah* (school), *pantai* (beach), and *rumah* (house); verbs such as *main* (play), *makan* (eat), *pergi* (go), *belajar* (study), and *hitung* (count); and adjectives including *besar* (big), *seru* (exciting), and *berani* (brave). In addition to these base forms, the subject also produced a limited but notable number of affixed words, as illustrated in Speech Event 2 below.

Speech Event 2:

Amir: *"Amir cekolah, belajal belitung sampai sepuluh."* (Amir goes to school and learns to count up to ten)

Researcher: *"Wah, pinter Amir. Belajar apa lagi di sekolah?"* (Wow, Amir is clever. What else do you learn at school?)

Amir:*"Melukis, nyanyi, main blok."* (Painting, singing, and playing with blocks.)

The production of *melukis* (me- + *lukis*, to paint) and *berhitung* (ber- + *hitung*, to count, realised as *belitung* due to the concurrent /r/ → /l/ substitution) demonstrates that the subject has begun to internalise the productive verbal prefix morphology of Indonesian. The simultaneous presence of morphological knowledge and phonological limitation within a single utterance is a particularly noteworthy feature of this developmental stage. It reflects the well-established observation that morphological and phonological acquisition do not proceed along identical timelines but rather develop along partially independent trajectories, with morphological awareness emerging even as phonological accuracy remains incomplete (Shin & Miller, 2022). Table 2 presents the full range of lexical categories represented in the subject's speech.

Table 2 Lexical Categories Represented in the Subject's Speech

No	Word Class	Examples	English Equivalents
1	Noun (Nomina)	sepeda, mobil, sekolah, pantai, rumah, kue	bicycle, car, school, beach, house, cake
2	Verb (Verba)	main, makan, pergi, belajar, hitung, naik	play, eat, go, study, count, ride
3	Adjective (Adjektiva)	besar, seru, berani, pinter, bagus	big, exciting, brave, clever, good
4	Affixed Words	melukis, berhitung, dibelikan, bermain	to paint, to count, to be bought, to play

Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

These morphological findings are consistent with the input-driven account of early morphological development elaborated by Anderson et al. (2021), who demonstrated in a large-scale meta-analysis that the quality and diversity of caregiver linguistic input exerts a direct and measurable influence on children's lexical and morphological growth during the preschool years. The vocabulary Amir has acquired closely reflects the objects, activities, and relationships most salient in his immediate domestic environment, confirming that semantic relevance and experiential frequency are primary drivers of early lexical acquisition at this stage. The subject's morphological profile does not contradict any prior finding documented in the literature; rather, it provides a concrete Indonesian-language

instance of the developmental pattern described by Shin and Miller (2022), whereby base word forms are consolidated before derivational morphology becomes fully productive. This adds to the comparatively limited body of morphological acquisition data available for Austronesian languages.

Syntactic Acquisition

At the syntactic level, the subject's spontaneous speech demonstrated the productive use of all four major sentence types identified in the classification framework of Moeliono et al. (2015): declarative, imperative, interrogative, and exclamatory sentences. Across the three-week observation period, a total of 47 utterances were classified and analysed. Of these, 22 utterances (46.8%) were declarative, 14 (29.8%) were interrogative, 8 (17.0%) were imperative, and 3 (6.4%) were exclamatory. Each sentence type is illustrated below through a representative speech event from the data corpus. *Declarative sentences* were the most frequently occurring type, reflecting the tendency of children at this developmental stage to use language primarily to report on their experiences, possessions, and observations.

Speech Event 3:

Amir: *"Ini Tayo, ada lagunya di tipi. Amir cuka Tayo."* (This is Tayo, his song is on TV. Amir likes Tayo)

Researcher: *"Oh iya, Amir suka Tayo ya? Kenapa suka Tayo?"* (Oh, so Amir likes Tayo? Why do you like Tayo?)

Amir: *"Tayo lucu, ada Logi sama. Dibeliin Ami mobil Tayo."* (Tayo is funny, Rogi is there too. Mum bought me a Tayo car)

The utterances *Ini Tayo* and *Amir cuka Tayo* exemplify declarative function, as the subject conveys factual information and personal preference to the interlocutor. Their structural simplicity, consisting predominantly of subject-predicate constructions, is characteristic of declarative production at this age. *Imperative sentences* were produced with comparatively lower frequency, appearing when the subject sought to direct the behaviour of the interlocutor.

Speech Event 4:

Amir: *" Kak, jajan di citu aja. Kakak cepatla, pulang kita lagi yuk."* (Let's buy some snacks over there. Come on, let's hurry and go home)

Researcher: *" Iya, tunggu kakak bayar dulu."* (Yes, wait for me to pay first)

Amir: *"Kita makan di telac ya, yuk kak."* (Let's eat on the terrace, come on)

The directives *Kakak cepatla* (hurry up) and *Kita makan di telac ya* (let us eat on the terrace) demonstrate the subject's ability to use language to regulate the actions of others. This capacity reflects growing sociopragmatic awareness, as the child has begun to understand that language can function not only as a tool for reporting but also as an instrument for influencing the behaviour of interlocutors. *Interrogative sentences* constituted the second most frequent type in the corpus, consistent with the characteristically high curiosity of children at this developmental stage and their ongoing need to gather information about their social and physical environment.

Speech Event 5:

Amir: *"Kak, pain?"* (What are you doing?)

Researcher: *"Kakak lagi nonton."* (I am watching something)

Amir: *"Nonton apa kak? Pilm apa?"* (What are you watching? What film?)

The question *Kak, pain?* constitutes an elliptical reduction of *lagi ngapain* (what you are doing), demonstrating the subject's emerging pragmatic economy, whereby surface form is reduced while communicative intent is preserved. This is a sophisticated pragmatic strategy that has been documented in children across diverse languages at this developmental stage (Karadöller et al., 2025). *Exclamatory sentences* were the least frequent type in the corpus, appearing on three occasions, each coinciding with the subject's encounter with an experience of particular novelty or excitement.

Speech Event 6:

Researcher: *"Amir tadi dari mana?"* (Where did you go earlier, Amir?)

Amir: *"Taplau! Amir tadi lihat ombak becal kak!"* (Taplau! Amir saw big waves earlier!)

Researcher: *"Wah, seru ya! Ngapain lagi di sana?"* (Wow, how exciting! What else did you do there?)

Amir: "*Naik mobil-mobil kak! Celuu! Ngeeng ngeng!"* (I rode the toy cars! It was exciting! Vroom vroom!)

The utterances *Amir tadi lihat ombak becal kak!* and *Naik mobil-mobil kak! Celuu!* are produced with markedly elevated intonation and express the subject's strong emotional response to an exciting experience, the defining prosodic and semantic features of exclamatory function. The use of onomatopoeia (*Ngeeng ngeng*) further illustrates the expressive and multimodal character of the subject's communicative repertoire at this stage.

Table 3 Sentence Types in the Subject's Speech

No	Sentence Type	Function	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
1	Declarative	Conveying information or statements	22	46.8
2	Interrogative	Requesting information	14	29.8
3	Imperative	Commanding or requesting action	8	17.0
4	Exclamatory	Expressing strong emotion	3	6.4
Total			**47**	**100**

Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

The frequency distribution observed in Table 3, with declarative sentences predominating, followed by interrogative, imperative, and finally exclamatory forms, is consistent with patterns reported by Buckalew et al. (2024), who demonstrated that declarative and interrogative structures are the most developmentally salient sentence types in early childhood, as they serve the child's primary communicative needs of reporting experience and seeking information. The finding that all four sentence types are present in the subject's repertoire also aligns with the developmental milestone data reported by Visser-Bochane et al. (2020), who identified the production of varied sentence forms as a normative achievement for children in the three-to-four-year age range.

Considered as a whole, the findings across the three levels of linguistic analysis present a coherent and internally consistent developmental profile that is broadly supportive of, and in several respects extends, the prior research reviewed in this study. At the phonological level, the substitution patterns confirm the cross-linguistic hierarchy reported by McLeod and Crowe (2018) and are consistent with Jakobson and MacMahon (1969) universalist framework, while providing new evidence from Indonesian. At the morphological level, the subject's reliance on environmentally salient base forms and emerging use of verbal prefixes aligns with the input-driven account of early morphological development (Anderson et al., 2021; Shin & Miller, 2022). At the syntactic level, the presence and frequency distribution of all four sentence types correspond to the developmental patterns (Buckalew et al., 2024; Karadöller et al., 2025). None of the three sets of findings contradicts the established literature; collectively, they extend it by providing Indonesian-language naturalistic evidence for developmental patterns that have to

date been documented predominantly in Indo-European languages, strengthening the empirical basis for cross-linguistic universalist accounts of early language development.

Several limitations of the present study warrant acknowledgement. First, the single-subject design, while appropriate for a detailed descriptive case study, restricts the generalisability of the findings to other children of the same age, language background, or socioeconomic context. Second, the three-week data collection period, though sufficient for an initial corpus, may not have captured the full range of the subject's linguistic production across all communicative domains and interlocutors. Third, the study was limited to a single linguistic community in Padang City, West Sumatra, and the findings may not be representative of the broader diversity of Indonesian-speaking children across different regional and cultural backgrounds. Future research should address these limitations through longitudinal designs involving multiple participants from diverse sociolinguistic environments, which would allow for more robust and generalisable conclusions regarding the developmental trajectory of Indonesian as a first language.

CONCLUSION

The phonological analysis of the subject's speech demonstrated that Amir Ahmad Alhasani, at three years of age, has not yet achieved accurate production of the trill consonant /r/ and the alveolar fricative /s/, which are consistently realised as the lateral approximant /l/ and the palatal affricate /c/ respectively. These substitution patterns were found to be positionally stable, occurring in both word-initial and word-final environments, and were applied consistently across all instances in which the target phonemes appeared. Such patterns are developmentally normative at this age and reflect the universal trajectory of consonant acquisition, in which articulatorily complex sounds are acquired later than simpler ones. This finding confirms that the subject's phonological development is proceeding within the expected range for his age group.

At the morphological level, the subject demonstrated productive command of a range of base lexical forms across multiple word classes, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, and interrogative words, all of which were drawn from the objects, activities, and relationships most salient in his immediate daily environment. The subject also showed emerging use of simple affixed forms, particularly verbal prefixes, although grammatical accuracy in their application remains incomplete. This pattern indicates that morphological acquisition at this stage is closely tied to the expansion of experiential vocabulary through sustained interaction with the surrounding environment, and that the productive use of derivational morphology develops gradually alongside growing lexical breadth.

At the syntactic level, the subject demonstrated the ability to produce all four major sentence types, namely declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences, with declarative sentences occurring most frequently,

followed by interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory forms. This distribution reflects the communicative priorities of a child at this developmental stage, who uses language primarily to share information and seek answers about the world around him. Taken together, the findings across the three levels of linguistic analysis indicate that the subject's first language development is progressing well within the expected parameters for a three-year-old child, despite the phonological limitations that remain. These findings carry practical implications for parents and early childhood educators, underscoring the importance of providing rich, responsive, and varied linguistic stimulation within both the home and educational environment in order to support optimal language development during this critical formative period.

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