Phonological Acquisition of Indonesian in Two-Year-Old Children in Magelang City

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Abstract

The critical period of phonological development in early childhood, where pronunciation errors can impact communication and subsequent language skills, serves as the background for this research. This research explores phonological acquisition in 2-year-old children in the city of Magelang in a study of the Indonesian language. The primary objective is to identify and describe the specific phonological patterns, including the mastery of vowels and consonants, and the common simplifications or errors present in their speech. The observational method involves data collection through recording children's conversations in their natural home environments, which were then transcribed and analyzed for phonetic and phonological features. The research results indicate individual variations in phonological acquisition, identifying developmental patterns and differences influenced by the environment. Key findings reveal that while vowel sounds are generally acquired early, significant variation exists in the production of consonants, with certain phonemes like /r/ and /s/ often being substituted or omitted. The study also highlights the strong influence of the local Magelang dialect and parental input on the children's emerging sound systems. Phonological analysis is conducted to understand changes in sound usage, vocabulary development, and the role of social interaction in shaping correct speech patterns. This study contributes to the understanding of phonological acquisition in the Indonesian language among preschool children, with practical implications for the development of educational strategies and interventions in Magelang city. In conclusion, the research underscores the interplay between universal developmental sequences and environmental factors in shaping early phonological competence.

Keywords: Age, Consonant Sounds, Phoneme, Vowel Sounds

1.   Introduction

The study of child language acquisition provides crucial insights into human cognitive and social development. Language serves as a fundamental tool for communication, enabling children to express thoughts, emotions, and needs from an early age. As children develop, their ability to acquire and use language progresses through predictable stages, though the pace varies individually (Indah, 2011). Understanding these developmental patterns is essential for identifying typical milestones and potential delays, thereby supporting effective educational and intervention strategies.

Within the broader scope of language acquisition, the phonological component holds particular significance during early childhood. Phonological acquisition refers to the process by which children learn to perceive and produce the sound system of their language. For two-year-old children, this stage is especially critical because they have not yet fully mastered phonemes, and pronunciation errors can directly impact vocabulary development and communication clarity (Lubis et al., 2022; Simbolon et al., 2022). Research focusing on this age group allows researchers to observe foundational sound patterns, including the emergence of vowels and consonants, as well as common phonological simplifications, providing a window into the early workings of the human language faculty.

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The Indonesian language, with its diverse regional variations, offers a rich context for studying phonological acquisition. Magelang, located in Central Java, is a multilingual setting where Javanese and Indonesian coexist. This study focuses on children acquiring Indonesian as their first language, though exposure to Javanese may influence their phonological development. Investigating phonological development in Magelang can therefore reveal how environmental and dialectal factors shape children's early speech patterns, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of language acquisition in multilingual Indonesian society.

Previous research has examined various aspects of child language acquisition in Indonesia. Mahajani & Muhtar (2019) explored language acquisition in elementary school-aged children, covering Javanese, English, Sundanese, and Indonesian. Meanwhile, Rafiyanti (2021) focused on syntactic and morphological acquisition in children aged 2 to 4 years. However, studies specifically addressing phonological acquisition in two-year-old children remain limited, particularly within the context of Magelang. This gap highlights the need for focused research that examines how very young children in this region acquire the sound system of Indonesian amidst local linguistic influences.

To address this gap, the present study aims to explore phonological acquisition in two-year-old children in Magelang. The research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What vowel and consonant sounds have been acquired by two-year-old children in Magelang? (2) What phonological simplifications or errors are commonly observed in their speech? (3) How does the local Magelang environment influence their phonological development? By investigating these questions, this study intends to provide a comprehensive description of early phonological patterns and contribute to the broader understanding of first language acquisition in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

To provide a foundational understanding of the concepts underlying this research, this section reviews key theories and previous findings related to language, first and second language acquisition, and the linguistic context in Indonesia. According to Kridalaksana (2013), language is a system of sound symbols used by a community to collaborate, identify themselves, and interact. A similar view is expressed by Syahidah & Setiawan (2022), who state that language is an arbitrary system of sound symbols used by a community for communication. In this study, language can be considered the primary symbol in the communication process and has existed exclusively for humans since ancient times (Fitriani, 2022). This shared perspective emphasizes the central role of language as a fundamental means of facilitating social relationships and group identity throughout human history.

Language acquisition begins in early childhood, with the first language acquisition being a natural process of understanding language. Zakaria et al. (2020) assert that children acquire their first language both directly and indirectly from their surrounding environment. This language acquisition starts in infancy, during which children unconsciously absorb observed symbols, forming the foundation of language (Suardi et al., 2019). A person's first language corresponds to their family's environment or ethnicity. For example, if someone is born into a Sundanese ethnic group and raised in a family that speaks Sundanese, that language becomes their first language (Anggaira, 2016). However, if their family speaks Javanese, even though they belong to the Sundanese ethnic group, Javanese becomes their first language. In conclusion, the mother tongue is the first language a person acquires, typically aligning with their ethnic and ancestral background.

The second language, which is generally acquired through education, serves as a foundation for linguistic proficiency after an individual has mastered their first language (Fatmawati, 2015). In Indonesia, the second language often takes the form of the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, which

acts as a unifying medium among communities that predominantly use regional languages as their mother tongue (Akhyaruddin & Yusra, 2024). While in some cases, Bahasa Indonesia can be a first language in major cities, this is often influenced by the decline in first language proficiency and an environment that predominantly uses Bahasa Indonesia (Afuri et al., 2023). Furthermore, the acquisition of a second language or additional languages is often a result of deliberate effort, driven by needs such as communication, employment, and education (Septiani & Setiawan, 2025). These needs vary depending on the individual learning the language. Many people in Indonesia grow up bilingual, mastering both Bahasa Indonesia and a regional language, with the regional language typically being acquired first (Nina et al., 2023).

3. Methods

This study employs an observational method using a qualitative descriptive approach. According to Sugiyono (2013), qualitative descriptive research is defined as a method for investigating the natural conditions of an object, where the researcher serves as the primary instrument in data collection techniques conducted in a combined manner. This method aims to provide a more detailed description of the observed phenomena.

The technique used in this study is the *simak libat cakap* (listen, engage, and speak) technique, which involves the researcher directly participating in data collection through active involvement. The *simak* technique follows the note-taking and recording method, where the researcher provides stimuli to the data sources to elicit the expected linguistic responses. First, the researcher prepares a gadget and plays several videos about animals, fruits, and everyday objects. Second, the participants respond by imitating the researcher in pronouncing the given words. Third, the researcher records the words spoken by the participants.

The data analysis process is conducted systematically following Pitaloka (2021) approach. The data reduction stage involves categorizing the collected data, the data presentation stage organizes the data into tables according to their categories, and the conclusion drawing stage discusses and interprets the presented data. The data sources for this study are two-year-old children in Magelang City, focusing on the phonological acquisition stage of first language development.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

This study refers to the theoretical concept of Dardjowidjojo (2012), which states that language acquisition is the process by which a child learns to master their mother tongue. At this stage, language acquisition falls into the two-word stage. This categorization is based on data collected from two-year-old children in Magelang City, who are classified as being in the two-word stage. The following section presents some of the collected data, as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. Phoneme Acquisition Data - Vowels

Vowel Phoneme	Word	Speech	Meaning
/a/	/sapi/	/api/	fire
	/kata?/	/ata?/	frog
	/gajah/	/ajah/	elephant
/i/	/ikan/	/itan/	fish
	/gigit/	/jijit/	bite
/u/	/kəruduŋ/	/udum/	veil
	/rusa/	/usa/	deer

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Vowel Phoneme	Word	Speech	Meaning
	/ular/	/uyar/	snake
/e/ dan /ə/	/pərmen/	/əmem/	candy
	/es krim/	/ecim/	ice cream
/o/	/domba/	/omba/	Sheep
	/mobil/	/obil/	car
	/onta/	/ota/	camel

Table 2. Consonant Phoneme Acquisition Data

Consonant Phoneme	Word	Speech	Meaning
/b/	/bebek/	/bebe/	duck
	/buruŋ/	/buyuŋ/	bird
	/biru/	/biyu/	blue
/g/	/gorila/	/goyiya/	gorilla
/h/	/buwah/	/uwah/	fruit
/k/	/kodok/	/odok/	frog
/m/	/merah/	/meyah/	red
	/diyam/	/iyam/	silent
	/kambiŋ/	/ambim/	goat
/n/	/kalkun/	/akun/	turkey
/p/	/piŋuwin/	/piwin/	penguin
/t/	/tuwa/	/tuwa/	old
	/wortəl/	/totəl/	carrot
/c/	/coklat/	/cukat/	brown
/s/	/tikus/	/itus/	mouse
/j/	/jəruk/	/jəyuk/	orange
/y/	/oraɲə/	/oyen/	orange

The collected data indicates two stages in the phonological acquisition process. The first stage involves the omission of speech sounds, while the second stage involves sound modifications in the words being spoken. Thus, phonological acquisition not only encompasses the elimination of speech sounds but also involves modifications at the word level.

4.1.1. Vowel Phonemes

The process of vowel phoneme acquisition in two-year-old children can be described as a consistent effort that has been successfully mastered. Each vowel phoneme, including /a/, /i/, /u/, /e/, and /o/, is pronounced fluently in every word. Therefore, it can be concluded that the level of mastery in vowel phoneme pronunciation among two-year-old children is relatively good.

1) Vowel /a/

The ability of the data source to pronounce the vowel sound /a/ demonstrates fluency, especially in words containing this vowel. This skill is evident in the data source's ability to pronounce /a/ both at the beginning and middle of words. This consistent ability reflects stable mastery of the /a/ vowel sound and good pronunciation skills in various word contexts. For example, in the utterance *[api]* (meaning *sapi* or "cow"), the consonant phoneme /s/ is omitted, resulting in *[api]*. In *[ata?]* (meaning *katak* or "frog"), the consonant phoneme /k/ is omitted, leading to *[ata?]*. Similarly, in *[ajah]* (meaning *gajah* or "elephant"), the consonant phoneme /g/ is omitted, producing *[ajah]*.

2) Vowel /i/

In the pronunciation of the vowel sound /i/, the data source has demonstrated fluency in every word containing this vowel. This skill is evident in the ability to articulate /i/ at both the beginning and middle of words. For example, the data source successfully pronounces /i/ at the beginning of words,

such as *[itan]* (meaning *ikan* or "fish"), and in the middle of words, such as *[jijit]* (meaning *digigit* or "bitten").

3)   Vowel /u/

The vowel sound /u/ is pronounced fluently by the data source in every word containing this vowel. This is evident as the data source can articulate the sound /u/ smoothly, both at the beginning and middle of words. This ability reflects consistent proficiency in pronouncing the vowel /u/ without difficulty, regardless of its position in a word. For instance, in the utterance *[udum]* (meaning *kəruduŋ* or "veil"), the consonant phonemes /k/, /r/, and /ŋ/, as well as the vowel phoneme /ə/, are omitted, and the phoneme /ŋ/ is changed to /m/, resulting in *[udum]*. In *[usa]* (meaning *rusa* or "deer"), the consonant phoneme /r/ is omitted, producing *[usa]*. Similarly, in *[uyar]* (meaning *ular* or "snake"), the consonant phoneme /l/ is omitted, and the phoneme /l/ is changed to /y/, leading to *[uyar]*.

4)   Vowel /e/ and /ə/

The vowel sounds /e/ and /ə/ are fluently pronounced by the data source in every word containing these vowels. This ability is evident as the data source successfully articulates the vowel /e/ in the middle of words and the vowel /ə/ at the beginning of words. For example, in the utterance *[əmen]* (meaning *pərmen* or "candy") and *[ecim]* (meaning *es krim* or "ice cream"), phoneme omissions and modifications occur. In *[pərmen]*, the consonant phonemes /p/ and /r/ are omitted, resulting in *[əmen]*. In *[es krim]*, the consonant phonemes /s/, /k/, and /r/ are omitted, and the phonemes /k/ and /r/ are changed to /c/, producing *[ecim]*.

5)   Vowel /o/

Regarding the vowel phoneme /o/, the data source demonstrates a strong ability to pronounce it fluently in every word containing this vowel. This is evident in the ability to articulate the vowel /o/ effortlessly, whether it appears at the beginning or in the middle of a word. This proficiency provides clear evidence of the data source's mastery of the vowel /o/ in various word positions. For instance, in the utterance *[omba]* (meaning *domba* or "sheep"), *[obil]* (meaning *mobil* or "car"), and *[ota]* (meaning *onta* or "camel"), phoneme omissions occur. In *[domba]*, the consonant phoneme /d/ is omitted, resulting in *[omba]*. In *[mobil]*, the consonant phoneme /m/ is omitted, producing *[obil]*. Similarly, in *[onta]*, the consonant phoneme /n/ is omitted, leading to *[ota]*.

4.1.2. Consonant Phonemes

Among two-year-old children in Magelang, the acquisition of consonant phonemes has not yet reached a satisfactory level of consistency. Data indicate that the consonant phonemes that can be articulated by children at this age include /b/, /g/, /h/, /k/, /m/, /n/, /p/, /t/, /c/, /s/, /j/, and /y/. However, it can be concluded that the mastery of consonant phoneme pronunciation in two-year-old children has not yet achieved full proficiency.

1)   Consonant /b/

In pronouncing the consonant /b/, the data source demonstrates fluency, especially in words containing the consonant /b/. This ability is evident when the data source can articulate the consonant /b/ both at the beginning and in the middle of a word effectively. For example, in the utterance [bebe], meaning *bebek* (duck), [buyuŋ], meaning *burung* (bird), and [biyu], meaning *biru* (blue). In the word *bebek*, the consonant phoneme /k/ is omitted, resulting in [bebe]. In *burung*, the consonant phoneme /r/ changes to /y/, resulting in [buyuŋ]. Similarly, in *biru*, the consonant phoneme /r/ changes to /y/, resulting in [biyu].

2) Consonant /g/

In pronouncing the consonant sound /g/, the data source has successfully articulated it fluently in words containing the consonant /g/. This ability is clearly observed when the data source can pronounce the consonant /g/ at the beginning of a word. This indicates the source's fluency in producing the consonant /g/ and provides tangible evidence of proficiency in pronouncing words with this consonant, particularly when it appears at the beginning of a syllable. For example, in the word [goyiya], meaning *gorila* (gorilla). In the word *gorila*, the consonant phonemes /r/ and /l/ are omitted and replaced with the phoneme /y/, resulting in [goyiya].

3) Consonant /h/

In pronouncing the consonant /h/, the data source has successfully articulated it fluently, especially in words containing the consonant /h/. This ability can be observed when the data source is able to pronounce the consonant /h/ correctly, even when it appears at the end of a word. For example, in the utterance [buwah], meaning *buah* (fruit). In the word *buah*, the data source was able to pronounce it correctly, resulting in [buwah].

4) Consonant /k/

Regarding the consonant /k/ sound, the data source has successfully articulated it fluently, especially in words containing the consonant /k/. This achievement can be assessed by the ability of the data source to pronounce the consonant /k/ at the end of a word. For example, in the utterance [odok], meaning *kodok* (frog). In the word *kodok*, the initial /k/ consonant phoneme is omitted, resulting in [odok].

5) Consonant /m/

In pronouncing the consonant /m/, the data source has successfully articulated it fluently in words containing the consonant /m/. This ability is evident when the data source can pronounce the consonant /m/ accurately, whether at the beginning, middle, or end of a word. For example, in the utterance [meyah], meaning *merah* (red), [iyam], meaning *diam* (silent), and [ambim], meaning *kambing* (goat). In the word *merah*, the consonant phoneme /r/ is omitted and replaced with /y/, resulting in [meyah]. In *diam*, the consonant phoneme /d/ is omitted, resulting in [iyam]. In *kambing*, the consonant phoneme /k/ is omitted, and the phoneme /ŋ/ is changed to /m/, resulting in [ambim].

6) Consonant /n/

In pronouncing the consonant /n/, the data source has successfully articulated it fluently in words containing the consonant /n/. This success is evident when the data source can pronounce the consonant /n/ at the end of a word. For example, in the utterance [akun], meaning *kalkun* (turkey). In the word *kalkun*, the consonant phonemes /k/ (initial) and /l/ are omitted, resulting in [akun].

7) Consonant /p/

In producing the consonant /p/ sound, the data source has been able to articulate it fluently in words containing the consonant /p/. This ability is clearly visible when the data source can pronounce the consonant /p/ at the beginning of a word with ease. For example, in the utterance [piwin], meaning *pinguin* (penguin). In the word *piŋuwin*, the consonant phoneme /ŋ/ is replaced by /w/, and the vowel phoneme /u/ is omitted, resulting in [piwin].

8) Consonant /t/

In producing the consonant /t/ sound, the data source has been able to articulate it fluently, especially in words containing the consonant /t/. This ability is demonstrated when the data source can

pronounce the consonant /t/ both at the beginning and in the middle of a word. For example, in the utterance [tuwa], meaning *tua* (old), and [totəl], meaning *wortel* (carrot). In the word *tua*, the data source can pronounce all phonemes completely. However, in the word *wortel*, the consonant phonemes /t/ and /r/ are omitted, and an additional /t/ is placed at the beginning, resulting in [totəl].

9) Consonant /c/

In pronouncing the consonant /c/, the data source has demonstrated the ability to articulate it fluently, especially in words containing the consonant /c/. This ability is evident when the data source can pronounce the consonant /c/ at the beginning of a word. For example, in the utterance [cukat], meaning *coklat* (chocolate). In the word *coklat*, the vowel phoneme /o/ is replaced by /u/, and the consonant phoneme /l/ is omitted, resulting in [cukat].

10) Consonant /s/

In pronouncing the consonant /s/, the data source has shown fluency in articulating the /s/ sound. This is evident in the data source's ability to pronounce the consonant /s/ clearly, even when it appears at the end of a word. For example, in the utterance [itus], meaning *tikus* (rat). In the word *tikus*, the consonant phonemes /t/ and /k/ are altered, with /k/ changing into /t/, resulting in [itus].

11) Consonant /j/

In pronouncing the consonant /j/, the data source has successfully articulated it clearly. This ability is reinforced by evidence that the data source can pronounce the consonant /j/ at the beginning of a word. For example, in the utterance [jəyuk], meaning *jeruk* (orange). In the word *jəruk*, the consonant phoneme /r/ is omitted and replaced with the consonant /y/, resulting in [jəyuk].

12) Consonant /y/

When pronouncing the consonant /y/, the data source has demonstrated the ability to articulate it correctly, especially in words containing the consonant /y/. This ability is evident when the data source can accurately pronounce the consonant /y/ and articulate it in the middle of a word. For example, in the utterance [oyen], meaning *oranye* (orange). In the word *orañə*, the consonant phoneme /r/ and vowel phoneme /a/ are omitted and replaced with the consonant /y/, resulting in [oyen].

4.2. Discussion

The findings of this study align with the theoretical concept proposed by Dardjowidjojo (2012), which characterizes language acquisition in two-year-old children as falling within the two-word stage. The observed patterns of phoneme omission and substitution confirm that children at this age are actively constructing their phonological systems, gradually moving toward adult-like speech. The complete mastery of vowel phonemes /a/, /i/, /u/, /e/, and /o/ support the notion that vowels are acquired earlier than consonants, a pattern consistent with universal tendencies in child language development.

The data also reflect the natural process of first language acquisition described by Zakaria et al. (2020), wherein children acquire language both directly and indirectly from their surrounding environment. In the context of Magelang, a multilingual setting where Javanese and Indonesian coexist, the children's phonological productions may be subtly influenced by the local linguistic environment. Although this study focuses on children acquiring Indonesian as their first language, exposure to Javanese phonetic features could contribute to the specific patterns of consonant modification observed, such as the substitution of /r/ with /y/ in words like [buyuŋ] for *burung* and [biyu] for *biru*.

Furthermore, the prevalence of phoneme omission, particularly of initial consonants, demonstrates that children simplify complex adult targets as they develop articulatory control. This

simplification process is a natural and expected part of phonological acquisition, reflecting cognitive and biological maturation. As Suardi et al. (2019) note, children unconsciously absorb symbols from their environment, and the gradual refinement of these symbols into accurate phonemes is evident in the data. The modifications observed, such as the change from /ŋ/ to /m/ in [ambim] for *kambing*, illustrate the creative ways children adapt sounds to fit their emerging phonological capabilities.

The bilingual context of Indonesia, as discussed by Nina et al. (2023), adds another layer of complexity to phonological development. While the children in this study are acquiring Indonesian as their first language, the potential influence of Javanese cannot be entirely discounted. Future research might explore whether the consonant substitution patterns identified here, particularly the /r/ to /y/ shift, are more pronounced in children with greater Javanese exposure. Overall, these findings contribute to the broader understanding of how Indonesian children navigate the phonological landscape of their multilingual environment during the critical two-year-old stage.

5. Conclusion

In this study, language acquisition in two-year-old children in Magelang City is focused on the stages of first-language phonological acquisition. According to Dardjowidjojo (2012), language acquisition in children is a process in which they learn to master their mother tongue. Observational results indicate that children at this age have made significant progress in acquiring vowel phonemes such as /a/, /i/, /u/, /e/, and /o/. They are able to pronounce these phonemes accurately in various word contexts. Meanwhile, the acquisition of consonant phonemes in two-year-old children has not yet reached a consistent level. Although they can pronounce several consonant phonemes, such as /b/, /g/, /h/, /k/, /m/, /n/, /p/, /t/, /c/, /s/, /j/, and /y/, their mastery still requires further development. Phonological acquisition at this stage involves phoneme omission and substitution, reflecting the complexity of the language acquisition process at this age. Therefore, understanding the stages of language acquisition in two-year-old children through this study can contribute to the literature on child language development.

The findings of this research carry practical implications for parents, educators, and speech therapists working with young children in Magelang. By recognizing that vowel phonemes are typically mastered earlier than consonants, caregivers can focus on encouraging consonant production through repetitive play, singing, and targeted conversational interactions. Furthermore, awareness that phoneme omission and substitution are normal developmental patterns can help reduce undue concern about perceived speech delays, while still identifying when professional intervention may be beneficial. Early childhood education programs in Magelang can also integrate these insights into their curricula, designing activities that support phonological growth in both Indonesian and Javanese linguistic contexts.

Future research should expand upon this study by including a larger and more diverse sample of two-year-old children across different neighborhoods in Magelang to capture a broader range of phonological variation. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable to track how these children's phonological systems develop over time, particularly as they progress beyond the two-word stage. Additionally, comparative studies examining phonological acquisition in monolingual Indonesian children versus those exposed to Javanese at home could further illuminate the role of bilingual input in shaping early sound systems. Finally, research exploring the relationship between phonological acquisition and other language domains, such as vocabulary growth and syntactic development, would provide a more holistic understanding of early language learning in Indonesian children.

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