

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Every human being must have ever experienced a sudden-temporary inability to comprehend someone's speech at the moment of listening to it. What is meant by inability is that they fail to understand what is spoken by the speaker and what messages are being conveyed to them as a listener. A vague or ambiguous message is captured by the listener, resulting in an irrelevant message, and the flow of conversation will be obscured. It occurs because both the speaker and listener are not within the same point of conversation—the intended message becomes unclear. The listener tends to misperceive the utterances which do not have any correlation with what the intended utterances of the speaker.

A misunderstanding could not be avoided in the situation of speaking, though the language used is the first language of both speaker and listener and they are under their consciousness. On the other hand, it happens spontaneously without any prominent indication that a listener misunderstands the utterances because the former conversation was going smooth without any obstacles. The occurrence of misunderstanding is because the listener could not hear clearly what the speaker says and the message is received differently. This natural phenomenon is widely known as slips of the ear. According to Field (2004), slips of the ear is depicted as errors of misperception held by a listener which contain the

knowledge of speech signal process and connected speech recognition in words. Bond (1999) also stated slips of the ear is an erroneous perception of an intended message as the result of listener's failure to understand a casual conversation. This clearly indicates that the occurrence of slips of the ear could take place in any situation, including casual conversation. Here is an example of slips of the ear within the conversation between a teacher and a student within a class:

Teacher : Okay Niko, repeat after me. "This is a goat".
Student : "This is a good".
Teacher : No Niko. 'Goat', not 'good'.
Student : Goat.
Teacher : Great. That is correct.

The example above is experienced by a six years old boy named Niko when he was asked to repeat the teacher's speech while reading the name of an animal. He is a student of a study course named LBB QU@LIFY. The teacher is the writer himself as he works as a part-time teacher in that study course. The student, as the listener, perceived what his teacher said is 'good' instead of 'goat'. The failure of comprehending speech perception by the student creates something odd that he perceived as 'good' instead of animals named 'goat'. These words have very different meanings though having similar sounds. The misunderstanding takes place because the student omitted the vowel [ə] towards the intended word and changed the final consonant [t] into [d].

The following is another example of slips of the ear experienced by a four years old boy named Al when having a conversation with his mother. The boy is the writer's nephew, and his mother is the writer's elder sister. The language used in the conversation below was Bahasa Indonesia as their first language:

Mother : *Mas Al ayo ganti bajunya dulu, sudah bau lho itu.*
 Al : *Nggak baru ini Mi bajunya Al.*
 Mother : *Memang nggak baru Mas Al, kan Ami bilang bau.*

The dialogue above took place after the mother, the writer's elder sister, picked up the writer's nephew from his school. Al's mother said to him that he needed to change his cloth because it was *bau* (stinky). Meanwhile, Al misperceived the word *bau* into *baru*. It could be identified that Al misperceived the word by inserting consonant [r] in the middle of the word which created a different perception of meaning of the intended word. He perceived it differently from the intended message and resulting in different meaning as well.

Those examples above show that the phenomenon of slips of the ear could happen when both speakers use their native or first language, either English or Bahasa Indonesia or even other languages in the world. According to Bond (2005), the spontaneous misperceptions experienced by the listeners also create unique ways of them in using linguistic knowledge in understanding the speech. It means that the words perceived by them have a similar sound, but they are far from the appropriateness of intended meaning. Furthermore, this phenomenon is not only experienced by persons with certain ages, whether children, teenagers, or adults—it happens to any ages. It is not only limited to a certain gender, but males and females have ever experienced it. It also could be seen that the context of conversations is casual conversations whose language is used daily in an informal setting.

The first example occurred within a class where there were only three children, and it was not a crowded situation though there was not very noisy. On

the contrary, the second example took place at home where there were only Al and his mother, which is quieter than in the class. Therefore, the phenomenon of mishearing is not limited to occur in a noisy situation, but in a quiet situation as well. The conversations being conducted above are within the consciousness of the listener as well as within a quiet situation.

The phenomena of misperception or mishearing are extensively known as slips of the ear. Formerly, this phenomenon was introduced by an American journalist Sylvia Wright with the name of 'mondegreen' (Aronson 2009). She misunderstood the last line of the first stanza in a Scottish ballad "The Bonny Earl Murray". The supposed last line is "And laid him on the green", while she misperceived it as "And Lady Mondegreen". Because of this, the other similar phenomena begin to occur as well as triggering the other slips of the ear phenomena. These phenomena belong to the discussion within the study of psycholinguistics, especially within the speech comprehension process which is initiated by the speech perception.

The phenomenon of slips of the ear has been studied by Bond (2005). She classified the occurrence of SOE according to five linguistic knowledge, which are phonetic knowledge, phonological knowledge, lexical knowledge, syntactic knowledge, and semantic and pragmatic knowledge. From the five linguistic knowledge mentioned, they are divided into 14 types of SOE which were used as the ground theory of this present study.

Some previous studies have investigated this kind of phenomenon with a different focus of aspects. Dewi (2018) and Artikah (2018) focused on slips of the ear of children of elementary school while perceiving children's speech. However, Dewi focused on children aged 7-9 years old or in the 1-3 grade, while Artikah's focus of subjects is children aged 10-12 years old or in the 4-6 grade. The context chosen of the two studies were also different, Dewi (2018) studied the slips of the ear of children within quiet situation, and Artikah's (2018) study is within noisy situation. Different from Dewi and Artikah, Linell (2015) focused on the adults perceiving adults' speech as the subjects of study. However, these researchers had a different concern about their study. Linell (2015) aimed to investigate how slips of the ear occurred in spontaneous utterances within the appropriateness of situation. On the other hand, Wardhani (2019) studied slips of the ear by children aged 4, 5, and 6 years old in Posyandu Matahari in a quiet situation. The subjects chosen in all studies mentioned above are the native people—Dewi, Artikah, Wardhani used native Indonesians, while Linell used native Swedens. In terms of the language being studied within the research, these four studies used native language (Artikah 2018, Dewi 2018, Linell 2015, Wardhani 2019). Dewi, Artikah, Linell and Wardhani used their native language—Dewi, Artikah, and Wardhani used Bahasa Indonesia, while Linell used the Swedish language.

It can be identified that those studies all focused on slips of the ear while perceiving the speakers' speech experienced by listeners whose range of age is the same: children perceive children's speech and adults perceive adults' speech. In particular, the researchers who chose children as the subjects mostly in the range

of 7-12 years old or elementary school students, while there is still a certain range of ages that could be included as children as well. Though Wardhani (2019) chose children with younger ages than the other studies mentioned, but she studied the SOE of them while perceiving the same range of ages as the participants. Therefore, there might be less studies which have investigated the phenomenon of slips of the ear with cross-sectional subjects—different range of age, while it is supposed to be essential to investigate as parents take an integral part in exposing the first language towards children (Cole 2008). Therefore, this study could enhance the knowledge of readers in understanding this phenomenon as well as broaden the knowledge of Psycholinguistics, especially in the area of speech perception.

The research of slips of the ear is worth to conduct, as it is a common phenomenon but is rarely to be investigated. As there has not been any research or little research was conducted to analyze the slips of the ear experienced by subjects with cross-sectional age, the present study aimed to explore the phenomenon of slips of the ear experienced by Indonesian aged 4-6 years old children in perceiving adults' speech within quiet situation. It is worth to conduct as there are less researches in slips of the ear with such specification and has a significance to be researched further. In addition, the language development of children with such age shows that they are on the level of linguistically fluency, whose basic skills of language have been prevailed, but still face 'virtuous' errors (Tassoni 2007). It denotes that children within such range of ages reach the milestone of their language acquisition process.

This research is part of an ongoing research project conducted by Masitha Achmad Syukri entitled 'Slips of the Ear Experienced by Indonesian Children in the Perception of Casual Conversation'.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

Based on the background of the study, the writer formulates the problems as follows:

1. What types of slips of the ear are experienced by Indonesian 4-6 years old children while perceiving adults' speech in a quiet situation?
2. What type of slips of the ear is mostly experienced by Indonesian 4-6 years old children while perceiving adults' speech in a quiet situation?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Regarding the statement of the problems mentioned above, the writer intends to:

1. To identify the types of slips of the ear experienced by Indonesian 4-6 years old children while perceiving adults' speech in a quiet situation.
2. To identify the type of slips of the ear which is mostly experienced by Indonesian 4-6 years old children while perceiving adults' speech in a quiet situation.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The present study is expected to theoretically contribute to the psycholinguistics field, especially in the area of speech perception. Therefore, the

findings of this study could be helpful to broaden the knowledge of speech perception process whose first process is in speech comprehension, particularly slips of the ears experienced by children in perceiving adults' speech to be researched further in the next study. Furthermore, hopefully this study can practically provide insights for both teachers and parents regarding the language ability of the children through the findings of the study. For parents, it may help them to find out the difficulty faced by their children in the process of their language acquisition. On the other hand, teachers could give proper methods in teaching them in order to enhance their language ability as well as minimizing the errors in listening to utterances.

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

- Slips of the ear :various reductions and simplifications of utterances in significant ways from the conventional one which creates listener's failure to understand what the speaker said and have no correspondence to the speaker's intended utterance (Bond 2005)
- Speech perception :a process in understanding spoken languages through decoding messages perceived by human beings (Berko-Gleason and Ratner 1998)
- Quiet situation :a situation where there is a little or absence of activity or excitement and few people (Cambridge University Press 2008).

- Children : people whose age is under 18 years old who is under the care and protection of parents and family (UNCRC 1989).