

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Nowadays, there are a lot of cases that we can find concerning with children with special need. They are the children who have some difficulties to study based on their age and level with some problems in their certain age; they have difficulty in communicating with other around them. The case hampers a child's ability to learn how to communicate, interact with others socially and indulge in an imaginative play, classified officially as a pervasive development disorder (PDD) and autism inhibits a child's development (Robledo & Ham-Kucharski, 2005).

Autistic child has some problems in acquiring language; it is clear that if language does not develop in an exact manner, it will bring some effects to their behavioral problems (qtd. Sundberg & Partington, 1998). Some of the most prominent problems are: difficulty in sharing information to others, limited interest characterized by attachment to certain objects and social interaction characterized by affective indifference, social isolation and difficulty in establishing relationships (qtd. Sundberg & Partington, 1998). Phonological development in autistic children is similar to the development of normal children but in autistic children, the

suprasegmental features of rate, prosody, rhythm, and quality represent delayed aspect of the language skill (Bartolucci et al., 1976).

In phonology, the alternation may occur in spontaneous speech (Lord and Paul, 1997). In certain cases, speech alternations like distortion or changes may present mistakes similar to those found in children with cognitive delay or language delay (Lord and Paul, 1997). In autistic children, the language skills are delayed at the age of 2 years and develop slowly until at the age of 5 years old (Lord, 1995).

Language alternation in autistic children is described as a specific language disorder and is divided into several groups: verbal auditory agnosia, phonology disorder, prosody disorder and so on (Artigas, 1999). The phonological alternation disorder refers to a change in the expressive aspects characterized by alternation in oral production (fluency and production) which become the result of the difficulty in understanding (Zhao, 2006).

According to Giegerich (1992), the phenomena of alternation can be classified into several types. Those are assimilation, dissimilation, deletion, insertion and so on. But in this study, the writer focuses on the three types of alternation. They are assimilation, insertion and deletion. This study will also focus on the phonological processes behind the alternation, such as substitution processes, assimilatory processes and syllable structure processes.

According to Fay and Schuler (1980), autistic children's phonological ability contrast to the developmental delays in other linguistics and communicative area. The use of suprasegmental features, such as stress and intonation, are often described as deviant in autistic children. Many therapists of autistic people have said that autistic children have peculiar voice quality. The stress and pitch patterns used by them are often inappropriate to the meaning of the linguistic utterance and the situation. Besides, autistic children are unable to process and utilize intonational features.

Concerning with the focus of this study, phonological alternations and processes in utterances of five years old autistic child, the writer will have five years old autistic child because in normal children after the age of three to four years old, they have increased some vocabularies and learned an average of three new words a day (Elkin and Weiner, 1978). While in autistic children, the linguistic skill of them at the age of two is delayed and develops slowly until the age of five and worst autistic children will stop talking at all if they are not taught to learn new vocabularies and have communicative routines (L.B. Zhao, 2006)). Therefore, it is estimated that at the age of five if he/she is treated by a therapist, at least he or she can utter or produce some words although it is wrong. The writer is going to take an autistic child aged five at Cakra House of Autism Therapy and the writer will be helped by the skilled therapist at Cakra to have the conversation with the participant.

This study will have one participant since it is a single case study which used qualitative method and approach. Furthermore, the purpose of case study is to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting (Punch, 1998).

1.2. Statement of the problem

Based on the explanation above, the writer would like to study the sound alternation occurred by a five-year-old autistic child. Furthermore, the writer wants to answer the following question:

1. What are the types of phonological alternations produced by a five-year old autistic child?
2. What are the types of phonological processes which affect the phonological alternations behind them?
3. Which type of phonological alternations and processes mostly occurred?

1.3. Objective of the study

This study is intended to find out and explain the occurrence of phonological alternation and processes in utterances by a five-year old autistic child.

1.4. Significance of the study

The result of this study later on is expected to enrich the studies which concern with psycholinguistics, especially the phonological development of children with autism. It may also give input to the parents whose children are autistic, to the therapists, and teachers to teach them to produce sounds better, and how to treat them in a good way.

1.5. Scope and limitations

The scope of this study is first language acquisition, especially in the phonological acquisition of a child with autism. The study, then, is limited to the purpose of finding out the phonological alternation and process such as substitution process, assimilatory process, syllable structure, deletion, insertion and metathesis in a five-year old autistic child's speech.

1.6. Definition of key terms

In “phonological alternation produced by an autistic child aged five years old”, there are some prominent terms used to clarify the meaning and context.

1. Autism: neurological disorder that usually manifests itself early in the toddler years, hampering a child's ability to learn how to communicate, interact with

others socially and indulge in an imaginative play (Robledo & Ham-Kucharski, 2005).

2. Phonological alternations: processes that alternate phones under the specific conditions in the representation of phonetic level (Davenport & Hannahs, 1998)
3. Phonological processes: processes that consist of a universal set of hierarchically ordered procedures used by children to simplify speech (Ingram, 1979).
4. Insertion: new phonemes which may appear from formerly unoccupied positions in the word or morpheme (Giegerich, 1992).
5. Deletion: some phonemes are deleted from formerly occupied positions in a word or morpheme (Giegerich, 1992).
6. Metathesis: transposition of phonemes with other phonemes which may be in the form of replacement, interchanging or substitution of phonemes (Giegerich, 1992)
7. Substitution Process: process which is the systematic replacement of a sound with an alternative (Ingram, 1979).
8. Assimilatory process: the modification of one or more features of a segment which is influenced by neighboring sound (Ingram, 1979).
9. Syllable structure: the systematic deletion of certain sounds in order to make syllable structure simple (Ingram, 1979)