

## LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: THE EFFORTS OF AFGHAN REFUGEES IN COMMUNICATING WITH LOCAL PEOPLE

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### Abstract

Language acquisition is a process which is experienced by a child in acquiring a first and second language. It needs a natural setting of target language in order to convey and understand the message correctly. The research was designed as a qualitative study to describe the process of second language acquisition experienced by Afghan refugees living in Makassar City for 5 to 10 years. In addition to describing the language acquisition process for Bahasa Indonesia as a second language, the study also explored the factors influencing this process. The research took 10 Afghan refugees who were proficient in Bahasa Indonesia as participants. To gather data related to their language acquisition and the factors influencing it, the informants were interviewed. Observation was used to supplement and verify the data on Bahasa Indonesia acquisition from the interviews. Thus, the data were analysed based on Krashen's theory (1995) of acquisition learning and the factors that influenced the informants' language acquisition. The research revealed that the refugees in Makassar used various methods (self-learning, courses) to acquire Bahasa Indonesia. They progressed through the five stages of language acquisition. Internal (motivation, personality, aptitude) and external factors (learning situations, local interactions) influenced their learning. Despite challenges, they persevered by practicing with Indonesian neighbours.

**Keyword:** language acquisition, Afghan refugees, efforts, interaction, local people

### INTRODUCTION

Many fields, like philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience, have long been interested in how people learn languages (Aktan-Erciyas, 2021). However, the way our minds work and how we think isn't directly related to theories about language acquisition. In the later part of the 1900s, our understanding of language interpretation improved greatly. On the other hand, Noam Chomsky (1957) suggested that babies are born with a natural ability to understand certain aspects of language, like proper grammar and sounds. These ideas are very important for understanding how we learn languages.

Learning a second language means naturally picking up words and how to use them to communicate. This usually happens after someone already knows their first language. Umaraa (2021) and Krashen (2002) described that being surrounded by the new language (the "environmental language") is a key factor. People who use this language often with locals tend to learn it more easily. Daily interactions help them absorb the language unconsciously, similar to how children learn their first language, rather than through deliberate memorization.

Language is a powerful tool for thinking and for clearly communicating with others (Fauzia, 2023). Without language, it's difficult to function well and participate in society. As we learn a language, we develop various skills like speaking, listening, reading,

and writing (Bin Mohd Tahir, (2023). Languages also connect people across cultures. Understanding multiple languages helps us communicate and build bridges between different backgrounds. This is why researchers are interested in how refugees learn languages. They want to understand the process and also the influential factors as well.

The researchers studied refugees documented the case of the Hazaras, a long-oppressed Shia Muslim minority in Afghanistan, who have fled to Indonesia seeking temporary shelter. Indonesia serves as a transit country for these refugees, where they typically stay for months or a few years at most. Their hope is to be resettled in another country, such as the US or Australia. However, these resettlement opportunities have become increasingly scarce in recent years, with both Australia and the United States significantly reducing their refugee intake quotas from Indonesia.

While Indonesia is not a party to the major refugee conventions, meaning refugees cannot permanently settle there, it does offer them temporary refuge. However, this comes with significant restrictions. Unlike most transit situations, refugees in Indonesia face limitations on movement, work opportunities, and education. Confined to specific city areas, they are unable to drive or even work to support themselves. Their only source of income is a meagre monthly allowance from the IOM, barely enough to cover basic necessities.

This research focused on the process of second language acquisition among Afghan refugees who have lived in Makassar City, South Sulawesi for several years. It's important to note that these refugees are not concentrated in one location; they are dispersed throughout various regions of Indonesia, including Jakarta, Denpasar, Kupang, Manado, Medan, Pekanbaru, Pontianak, Semarang, Tanjung Pinang, and Makassar City. Although Afghanistan gained independence in August 1919, establishing a monarchy. However, the country has been plagued by a seemingly endless civil war. As a result, many civilians have fled to safer countries, seeking asylum and a brighter future.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to various scholars, psycholinguistics bridges the gap between human language and the mind. Field (2003) suggests that psycholinguistics explores the connection between the brain and language use. Similarly, Carroll (1953, cited in Ellis, 1997) highlights linguistics as the study of human language, while psychology delves into the human mind, emotions, and soul. Kridalaksana (1982) expands on this concept, defining psycholinguistics as the field that examines the links between language and behavior, human reasoning, and language proficiency. For example, psycholinguistics can help us understand how a newborn baby develops language skills. We can observe how they begin with sounds and progress towards understanding and producing spoken language.

According to Krashen (2002), children acquire both their first and second languages in a very similar way. This process emphasizes meaningful interactions in a natural setting, where the focus is on understanding and conveying messages, rather than strict grammatical accuracy. Krashen further proposed five key hypotheses related to language acquisition. These hypotheses, introduced throughout the 1980s and still relevant today, include: a) Acquisition – Learning hypothesis, b) Monitor hypothesis, c) Natural hypothesis order, d) Input hypothesis, and e) Effective filter hypothesis.

While several hypotheses have been proposed regarding second language acquisition, researchers have placed particular emphasis on the acquisition-learning hypothesis. This hypothesis focuses on how learners acquire or learn a second language as a system. It proposes that language mastery happens subconsciously. Krashen (1982) emphasizes acquisition as an unconscious process in second language acquisition. He explains that learners may not be aware they're actively learning the language; they're simply focused on communication. In short, language acquisition flourishes through natural, communicative

interactions, not through a rigid focus on linguistic rules.

Mitchell and Myles (2004) in Mawaddah (2019) defined a foreign language is one that has no immediate local use or speakers in a particular community. It is not a commonly spoken by communities where you live. In simpler terms, it's any language other than the dominant language(s) of the learner's environment. Following this definition, Spanish would be a foreign language for someone living in India. On the other hand, a second language is one that people learn on top of native language and is used regularly in their environment. For example, English could be a second language for someone living in India, depending on the context.

Krashen's (1986) model of second language acquisition outlines five stages learners typically progress through: preproduction, early production, speech emergence, intermediate fluency, and advanced fluency (ASCD, 2018; Haynes, 2007; Betti, 1996). The following section outlines the five stages are as follows.

The first stage, preproduction, is often called the "silent period." Learners at this stage understand up to 500 words but might not speak much yet (Haynes, 2007). This quiet phase isn't universal; some learners jump right in and try things out, even if it's not perfect. To encourage speaking, inviting guest speakers early on can be helpful. This silent period can last anywhere from three to six months (Ellis, 2008; Al-Seady, 2002a). The second stage, early production, allows learners to speak in short phrases of one or two words. They may also memorize chunks of language, but might struggle to use them correctly on their own. Learners typically have a vocabulary of around 1,000 words at this point. This stage usually lasts about six months (Haynes, 2007; Betti, 1998). In the third stage, speech emergence, learners' vocabulary expands to around 3,000 words. They can communicate using basic questions and sentences, although they might still make grammatical errors frequently. The fourth stage, intermediate fluency, allows learners to use more complex sentence structures and express their ideas and opinions. Their vocabulary grows to around 6,000 words. However, the more complex the sentence structure, the more likely they are to make mistakes. The final stage, advanced fluency, can take five to ten years of dedicated study to achieve. Learners at this stage can communicate just as well as native speakers (Haynes, 2007; Al-Seady, 2002b).

When learning second language, there are some factors that may influence learners in acquiring their second language. The factors are divided into internal factors and external factors. In internal factors, a learner's success in acquiring a second language is influenced by internal factors like motivation and preferred learning styles (Ellis, 1985). These factors are all rooted in psychology: motivation, personality, and language aptitude.

Motivation is a key factor influencing how well someone learns a second language (SLA process). It involves a learner's effort, desire, and positive attitude towards the language (Yazigy, 1991). Motivation is often influenced by social factors. Parents often play a leading role by encouraging their children to use the second language in daily life. Siblings, friends, and even the workplace can all contribute to a learner's motivation.

Personality, a combination of unique traits (Dornyei, 2005), can influence how someone learns a second language. For instance, people with high self-confidence often find language learning easier than those who are more shy. Introverts and extroverts represent two common personality types. Introverts tend to be more reserved and may fulfill their needs independently. This characteristic might affect language learning because introverts might prefer solitary activities over practicing conversation.

language aptitude determines that a student's natural abilities, including speaking skills and general intelligence, can influence their language learning aptitude. Memory plays a crucial role in this process, as even retaining basic vocabulary requires memorization. Episodic memory, as identified by Tulving (1983), is particularly important. This type of memory helps connect the sound of a word with the sensory experience of seeing, touching, or smelling the object it represents.

in external factors, learners can acquire a language through both informal and formal settings. The researchers like Lightbown & Spada (2001), Marsick & Watkins (1990), and Rogers (2004) have explored these different learning environments, namely formal and informal situations.

This circumstance is called a formal learning environment, like a language course. Here, learning is structured and planned, with a focus on consciously acquiring the second language. Learners typically study grammar rules, but there might be less emphasis on how native speakers actually use the language in everyday communication.

Learning a second language in a casual, everyday setting is called an informal situation. Here, the language is picked up unconsciously, similar to how you learned your first language. Learners focus on understanding meaning through constant exposure and conversations with native speakers. This immersion helps them grasp the subtler aspects of the language, like slang, cultural references, and how to use the language appropriately in different situations. This allows them to develop a more natural and intuitive understanding of the second language.

### **METHODS**

This research employed descriptive qualitative methods to explore the language acquisition experiences of Afghan refugees living in Makassar City. In addition, it also described the language acquisition process and the factors that influenced them in acquiring the second language. As Ary (2010) stated that qualitative research focuses on understanding experiences and phenomena through words and images, rather than relying on numerical data and statistical analysis.

This study involved 10 Afghan male refugees living in Makassar City for 5 to 10 years. The research used observations to find out the data related to the language use that were experienced by the informants when interacting with their neighbors. This study employed interviews to gather data on the factors influencing the ability of Afghan male refugees in Makassar City to acquire a second language and the process of acquiring the language.

The data were analyzed based on the objective of research which intended to describe the process of language acquisition and the influential factors in language acquisition experienced by Afghan refugees. The researchers classified first then analyzed the process of language acquisition using data collected from observation related to language uses. Thus, the factors that influenced language acquisition were analyzed based on data from interview by using Krashen' theory (1995).

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This section presents the findings and analysis of how Afghan refugees living in Makassar City acquire the Indonesian language. The description would highlight the process of second language acquisition and factors influencing the language acquisition of Indonesian.

#### **Process of Second Language Acquisition**

The study revealed that refugees living amongst Indonesian speakers tended to acquire the language more readily. Some participants learned Indonesian independently, by simply listening to people's conversations, both casual and intentional. Others, who had been in Indonesia for several years and attended schools or colleges, were immersed in the language, pushing them to develop fluency.

The study found that participants went through different stages in learning Indonesian. All participants had a quiet period at the beginning, similar to a "pre-production" phase (Table 1). For participants JL and ML, this quiet period lasted a year as they debated whether to learn Indonesian. During this time, they were unknowingly exposed to the language through daily life in Indonesia and interactions with Indonesians.

Table 1. Preproduction

Informant	Statement	Translation
JL	<i>"Oh... pertama yang benarnya 1 tahun saya kira saya sementara disini, saya tidak mau belajar Bahasa Indonesia. Cuman aku fokus di Bahasa Inggris saja, kan itu Bahasa Inggris juga bukan bahasaku, Bahasa Afghanistan itu Farsi. Bahasa Inggris saya mulai belajar, setelah 1 tahun aku lihat satu kali saya pernah pergi di pantai Losari, dan saya susah mau kembali kekamarku. Dan waktu aku mau tanya dari orang, tapi orang tidak mengerti Bahasa Inggris yaa setelah itu saya sudah mau belajar Bahasa Indonesia karena sulit itu harus belajar..."</i>	Oh... at first, I thought that I would only be here for a year, so I didn't want to learn Indonesian. I only focused on English, even though English isn't my native language either. Dari is the Persian language. I started learning English after a year. I remember going to Losari Beach once and having a hard time finding my way back to my hotel. I tried asking for directions from people, but they didn't understand English. That's when I decided to start learning Indonesian, because it's hard to learn...
ML	<i>"Tahun 2015 karena saya masuk di Indonesia 2014, satu tahun aku masih bingung disini ha..ha.. ya mulai tahun depannya saya mulai belajar".</i>	I started learning Indonesian in 2015. I arrived in Indonesia in 2014, and I was still confused about everything for the first year. Haha. But starting the following year, I began to study the language

This unconscious exposure created a connection with the language. However, some participants skipped this quiet period and began actively learning Indonesian right away, recognizing it as a necessary tool for daily communication.

The study identified a second stage called "early production". During this stage, learners can speak in short phrases, typically one or two words long (Table 2). For example, JW, an Afghan refugee participant, mentioned starting with learning numbers from 1 to 10. Another participant, JL, shared that they began by memorizing basic questions like "how are you?" and "where are you going?" This highlights how learners often start with simple, practical phrases for everyday communication.

The findings support Krashen's (1986) theory of "early production" as the second stage of language acquisition. All participants in the study, including HB, SH, MH, JW, HD, ML, RHL, and AL, demonstrated this stage by initially learning and memorizing basic Indonesian words. They progressed to being able to speak these basic words and retain them for future use. This aligns with Krashen's notion of learners constructing short phrases of one or two words during this early production stage.

As learners progress, their vocabulary expands to around 3,000 words, allowing them to communicate with basic questions and sentences (Table 3). While grammatical mistakes are common, they can still get their point across. This stage, often referred to as "speech emergence," marks a turning point where learners can answer "how" and "why" questions that require more in-depth explanations. Although their understanding deepens, grammatical errors persist.

For example, some informants faced specific challenges: HB, HD, and RHL struggled with pronunciation. ML had trouble structuring sentences, often reversing words while speaking. JL, on the other hand, had difficulty understanding the meaning of certain words. This aligns with Krashen's theory (1986) which proposes that the "speech emergence" stage involves basic communication with frequent grammatical errors.

The interviews revealed that three participants had reached the "intermediate fluency" stage. At this level, they could clearly communicate ideas and opinions to the researcher using well-structured language. Their responses were easy to understand.

This stage aligns with Krashen's theory (1986) of "intermediate fluency." The informants could readily express their own thoughts and viewpoints, requiring minimal hesitation or time to formulate sentences when answering the researcher's questions (Table 4).

**Table 2. Early Production**

Informant	Statement	Translation
JW	<i>"...nah ada temanku dari... mana lagi itu.. bukan orang Indonesia juga dia, sama seperti saya pengungsi, dia bilang coba saya misalkan saya ajarkan kamu angka saja dulu gitu di pinggir jalan kita duduk begitu sambil cerita gitu, lalu dia dari 1-10 dia ajar saya tapi kayak cepat sekali ku belajar bahasanya gitu, bahasa angka itu, lalu yah setelah itulah, mulai dari apa kabar begitu"</i>	So, I have a friend from... where was that again? He's not Indonesian either, he's a refugee like me. He said, 'Let me try teaching you just numbers at first, okay? We can sit by the side of the road and chat while I do it.' So, he taught me numbers from 1 to 10, but I seemed to learn the language of numbers really quickly. And then after that, we started with greetings like 'how are you?'..."
HB	<i>"Apa kabar, ada, tidak ada, berapa... itu".</i>	How are you, is there, isn't there, how much... that
SH	<i>"Kata-kata kayak apa kabar, baik-baik... kayak gitu"</i>	Words like how are you, well... like that.)
JL	<i>"...itu ada bukunya aku hafal-hafal disitu dipertama seperti apa kabar, nama kamu siapa, mau kemana, seperti kata-kata yang pertama saya sudah hafal dari buku itu, ya Trouble to Indonesia."</i>	<i>(...I had a book, and I memorized basic phrases like 'how are you?', 'what is your name?', and 'where are you going?' from it.</i>
MR	<i>"Waktu pertama kali saya belajar Bahasa Indonesia, saya cuma tahu apa kabar, dengan berapa harga".</i>	When I first started learning Indonesian, the only phrases I knew were 'apa kabar?' (how are you?) and 'how much is it?'"
JW	<i>"Saya ketahu... apa kabar, kamu baik, Alhamdulillah sehat".</i>	(I know... how are you, you're kind, Alhamdulillah I'm healthy)
HD	<i>"Selamat datang' karena itu sudah tulis di jalan dan belajar disitu".</i>	Welcome aboard! The path ahead is your teacher.
RHL	<i>"Itu yang biasa seperti apa kabar, yang kamu dimana, yang biasa saja".</i>	Common everyday phrases, like 'how are you?', 'where are you?', just basic stuff."
AL	<i>"Yang kalimat-kalimat dasar misalnya toh yang perkenalkan, begitu yang kata-kata yang biasa".</i>	Just basic sentences, like introductions, you know...the usual stuff.

One participant, AL, even expressed the joy of multilingualism, stating that knowing multiple languages feels like being multiple people. For instance, knowing two languages would be like being two people. This sentiment reinforces the concept of expanded horizons and increased communication possibilities that come with language acquisition.

The study did not identify any participants who reached the final stage of "advanced fluency." At this level, individuals would have a near-perfect understanding of the language, with minimal vocabulary gaps. Reaching this level is particularly challenging for Afghan refugees, as it requires speaking Indonesian as flawlessly as a native speaker. Most participants learned the language unintentionally through everyday interactions. While some achieved a level where they could converse well with one or two native speakers, not all reached fluency. However, they were still able to effectively communicate their ideas and express themselves clearly to the researcher.

### Factors influencing the Language Acquisition of Indonesian

The interviews revealed that motivation emerged as a key internal factor driving participants' engagement with the Indonesian community. This motivation often stemmed from personal reasons. For example, JW, who had an ex-girlfriend from Indonesia, was motivated to learn the language to connect with her. Others felt it was essential for navigating daily life within their Indonesian environment. This aligns with Ellis's theory (1997) on "integrative motivation," which posits that learners can be driven by a desire to connect with the culture and people associated with a language.

In addition, observations revealed ML's high level of confidence when interacting with researchers and friends. This suggests that his personality played a positive role in his rapid acquisition of Bahasa Indonesia. His confidence stemmed from a belief in his own ability to learn a second language. These observations align with Ellis's theory (1997), which emphasizes the impact of motivation, personality, and language aptitude on second language learning.

The study identified both formal and informal factors contributing to language acquisition. Formal learning involves intentional efforts to improve language skills, such as taking a course. For instance, SH mentioned attending classes at the Latimojong English Course to further develop his Indonesian.

**Table 3. Speech Emergence**

Informant	Statement	Translation
JL	<i>"jadi yang paling lancar pas sudah masuk di Makassar, dari pokoknya dari siapalah gitu, sudah belajar gitu....tapi yah pastilah ada beberapa kata-kata yang nda bisa kayak disebutkan atau dipronouncekan ya dengan oke sekali gitu"</i>	I learned most fluently when I arrived in Makassar. I learned from everyone, really, but... of course, there are some words that are difficult to pronounce."
ML	<i>"Ah....ada banyak yang maksudnya beda saya.. biasa saya bilang kayak contohnya telur tapi saya bilang teluuu, ada begitu banyak..."</i>	(Ah... there are many words that have different meanings. For example, the word for 'egg' (telur), I can only pronounce as 'te-loo'. There are still many other words that are difficult for me to pronounce..."
SH	<i>"Sedikit-sedikit di warung tapi ada kelas juga... Mulainya disini di Makassar.....disini di Latimojong...."</i>	<i>I used to study a little bit at a time while sitting at a food stall, but I've also started taking a course in Makassar. The course is located here in Latimojong."</i>
JL	<i>"Nanti setelah saya bisa menghafal banyak kosa-kata baru bisa saya pakai bercakap dengan orang lain. Saya belum terlalu paham Bahasa, mungkin akan terdengar lucu jika saya menggunakannya. Nanti orang Indonesia akan menertawai jika saya salah berbicara"</i>	I think that after I can memorize a lot of new vocabulary, then I can use it to converse with other people. I don't understand the language very well yet, so it might sound funny if I use it. Maybe Indonesian people will laugh at me if I speak incorrectly.
HD	<i>"Susah berbicara yang benar misalkan BUNGA, susah untuk orang luar negeri, untuk orang Indonesia itu mudah, bukan aku juga"</i>	For foreigners, I find it difficult to pronounce the word "bunga", but for Indonesians, it's certainly easy.
ML	<i>"Iya, dari bicara sama orang local kan, ada aplikasi chat juga, chat dengan orang local, jadi belajar begitu, nda pernah ambil kursus"</i>	Yes, I use language exchange apps when speaking with native speakers. So, I'm learning from those interactions rather than through formal courses

Table 4. Intermediate Fluency

Informant	Statement	Translation
JW	<i>"Sebenarnya saya tidak menemukan kesulitan, karena saya merasa saya bisa belajar sendiri sampai bisa bercakap lancar seperti ini. Meskipun masih ada beberapa kata yang susah dilafalkan seperti pelafalan orang lokal."</i>	"Actually, I haven't encountered any significant difficulties. I feel like I've been able to teach myself to speak fluently as I am now. Although, there are still a few words that I struggle to pronounce like a native speaker
JL	<i>"Untuk pertama kali saya merasa susah sekali sampai saya bisa menghafal banyak kosa kata, barulah terasa mudah. Saya punya teman yang selalu mensupport saya untuk belajar. Jika tidak ada teman yang support saya, akan terasa susah belajar sendiri."</i>	Initially, I found it is very difficult until I was able to memorize a large vocabulary. After that, it became much easier. I have a friend who has always supported me in learning. Without their encouragement, I believe learning on my own would have been much more challenging.
RHL	<i>"Saya senang kalau kita bisa lancar menggunakan bahasa asing di negara orang karena kita dianggap 2 orang. Artinya, berapa bahasa yang kita kuasai dianggap berapa orang sesuai jumlah bahasa yang dikuasai."</i>	I'm happy that we can communicate fluently in a foreign language when we're in another country because it's as if we're two people. It means, the number of languages we know is equivalent to the number of people we are perceived to be.

Informal factors also play a role in language acquisition. JW and HB, for example, lived in Indonesian-speaking communities. This natural environment exposed them to the language daily, facilitating their learning. JW mentioned learning directly from his Indonesian friends while socializing at cafes. This highlights the positive influence of a supportive social environment on language acquisition. The findings suggest that most participants acquired Indonesian through immersion, being forced to use the language in their environment. Their learning process progressed through stages identified by Krashen (1986): preproduction, early production, speech emergence, and intermediate fluency. However, it's important to note that individual capabilities can influence the pace of progress, and not all participants may have experienced all stages at the same pace.

These factors can be internal or external. Internal factors include motivation, personality, and language aptitude. Motivation refers to the desire to learn the language, personality traits can influence learning styles, and language aptitude reflects an individual's natural ability to learn languages. External factors encompass both formal and informal learning environments. Formal situations involve structured learning, such as attending language courses. Informal situations involve exposure to the language through daily interactions with native speakers (Ellis, 1997). Despite facing challenges, the participants remain persistent in practicing and communicating with locals. A common hurdle they encounter is pronouncing the sounds "{n}" and "{ŋ}". These sounds can be tricky, making it difficult for them to perfectly pronounce words like " buŋa/ (flower), /meŋaji, / (read Quran) /taŋguŋ/(responsibility). Nevertheless, they can still understand the meaning of these words even if they can't pronounce them flawlessly. The researchers believe that refugees can leverage their environment to facilitate learning Indonesian. Hanging out with friends and communicating with them is one way this happens. Additionally, some refugees take courses or study in schools to further develop their language skills. This supports the idea that people living in a country for a long time can unconsciously acquire the local language.



## CONCLUSION

Based on the finding and analysis, this research revealed that Afghan's refugees had acquired second language acquisition, Bahasa Indonesia by experiencing four stages in language acquisition, namely pre-production, early production, speech emergence and intermediate fluency. No one of informants has passed the last stages, advanced fluency, since the stages is difficult to be reached by the second/foreign language learners in short time and without learning the language both in formal and informal situation.

The research identified two main categories of factors influencing language acquisition: internal and external. Internal factors include a person's motivation to learn, personality traits, and natural language aptitude. External factors encompass both formal and informal learning environments. Formal settings involve planned learning activities like enrolling in language courses. The learners can specifically learn grammar and vocabulary mastery. While informal settings provide opportunities for unconscious language acquisition through everyday interactions with local people as native speakers. In these situations, learners pick up the language naturally by listening, speaking, and absorbing the language in use.

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