

Syntactic Awareness of Early Childhood Aged 5-6: A Case of Sentence Structure

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Abstract: This study seeks to examine syntactic awareness in early childhood aged 5-6 by using word-order correction task. The students were tested through two media; picture and flash card. The data used in the present study were gathered from two kindergartens that consist of forty-five students in Bandung; Kindergarten A was about 21 students and Kindergarten B was about 24 students. This study employs a quantitative approach and was collected in two ways: 1) visual tasks that consist of identification and correction task, and 2) observation during the execution by using recorders. The finding shows that syntactic awareness has emerged among kindergarten students. However, since the task consists of active and passive sentence tasks, the finding shows different results. In Kindergarten A, results in active sentence task are 78.9% students can identify wrong sentences, and 78.17% students can correct the jumbled sentence. In passive sentence task, 80.9% students can identify wrong sentences, and 55.9% students can correct the jumbled sentence. Meanwhile, in Kindergarten B, results in active sentence task are 92,1% students can identify wrong sentences, and 57.9% students can correct the jumbled sentence. In passive sentence task, 95.8% students can identify wrong sentences, and 35.9% students can correct the jumbled sentence. Then, the total number of students that can answer the test is 73.6% for Kindergarten A and 71.3% for Kindergarten B. Some of the students can identify which sentence is wrong, but they confuse how to put the words into the right order. Those findings reveal that: 1) Kindergarten A excels in syntactic awareness, but the score's difference is not significant, that is only 2.3%, 2) Correction task is more difficult than identification task, and 3) Passive sentence is more difficult than active sentence.

1 INTRODUCTION

The period in which children start to enter their first formal school (kindergarten) is interesting to be investigated. Kindergarten is expected to help students develop potentials, such as language skill (Nova, 2012). Language skill will help the children to understand the words, sentences, and also the relationship between spoken language and writing (Karmila, 2012). Furthermore, language skill also enables children to engage with other people and learn from their surroundings and in the classroom. By age five, children essentially master the sound system and grammar of their language and acquire thousands of words (Hoff, 2009). Hoff (2009) also mentions that when children gradually master the grammar of a language, they become able to produce increasingly long and grammatically complete

utterances. It is because age five is a period of time which a high-level of achievement is reached (Golden Age).

According to Robertson (2017), the first five years of children's lives are the most important in terms of Language Development. Therefore, it is important for them to acquire reading or writing skill. Among other areas of metalinguistic development, syntactic awareness is relevant to the acquisition of reading. Syntactic awareness refers to the child's ability to notice the internal grammatical structure of sentences (Genc, 2013). Tunmer and Hoover (1992) mentioned that syntactic awareness has been facilitating reading development via a more direct contribution to reading comprehension. However, before children learn to read, they need to develop the ability to speak, listen, and understand. Tasks that measure syntactic awareness focus on the sentence level and require the language used to reflect on and

manipulate the grammatical well-formedness and syntactic structure of sentences (Bowey, 1986; Nagy & Scott, 2000).

A number of studies regarding syntactic awareness have been conducted in some fields. For instance, in 2010, Davidson, Rasche, and Pervez investigated 3–5 years old bilingual children. The result shows that bilingual children aged 3 and 4 were better at detecting grammatically incorrect sentences than their monolingual peers. However, no significant differences appeared in monolingual and bilingual children's ability to detect grammatically correct sentences. Then, in Apel and Brimo (2015) were examining the direct and indirect effects of syntactic knowledge in a model of reading comprehension among 9th and 10th-grade students. It shows that syntactic awareness did not contribute significant variance and they did not find an indirect effect of syntactic awareness through syntactic knowledge on reading comprehension.

Meanwhile, studies related to language awareness, specifically on syntactic awareness of Indonesian children is relatively small (Komara, 2016). In 2012, Impuni measured syntactic awareness to children aged 5 by retelling the story. The result shows that the children produced different complex and compound sentences. Meanwhile, Komara (2016) focused on assessing preschool students' syntactic awareness through their ability to correct and identify the sentences in the level of verbal structures by using audiovisual. He found that even though the children could produce or manipulate S-P-O (SVO), some of them could not answer the same sentence on jumbled ways.

The present study will examine the student in active and passive sentence structure by using word order and it will be tested through a flash card. According to Tunmer (1987) in Nation and Snowling (2000), syntactic awareness had been measured using word order correction tasks in which the children get a challenge to the scrambled sentence. Using word order is beneficial for the student because it will train their mental capacity and developmental abilities to understand the logic and reasoning behind learning the parts of the sentence (Young, 2017). Nation and Snowling (2000) mention that for children, passive sentences are harder than active sentences. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, Dardjowidjojo (2005) mentions that passive form in Bahasa Indonesia is more dominant rather than active form so that children are often heard passive form than active form. Hence, Indonesian children able to produce passive form much earlier rather than active form.

2 LITERARY REVIEW

2.1 Metalinguistic Awareness

Metalinguistic awareness has been defined as “the ability to reflect upon and manipulate the structural features of spoken language itself as an object of thought.” (Tunmer & Herriman, 1984 as cited in Hodson & Aikins, 2004). Metalinguistic awareness is high level linguistic skills which requires three aspects which are an ability to comprehend and produce language in a communicative way, an ability to separate language structure from communicative intent, and an ability to use control processing to perform mental operations on structural features of language (Chaney, 1991 as cited in Genc, 2013). Metalinguistic awareness covers morphological awareness, syntactic awareness and phonological awareness. Tunmer (1984) explains in detail that metalinguistic is such a higher level of using language. Its definition lies in language that describes phoneme, morpheme, and syntax.

2.2 Syntactic Awareness

Syntactic awareness refers to the child's ability to notice internal grammatical structure of sentences (Genc, 2013). It measures children to identify correct and incorrect grammatical constructions (the grammaticality judgment task). Although children are unable to say a relevant rule structure, they may be aware of the language systematicity. Syntactic awareness may be the most promising candidate as an additional measure of metalinguistic awareness and that more research on this measure is needed (McGuinness, 2005; Roth et al., 1996). Tunmer (1987) adds that syntactic awareness will give the child's ability to reflect upon and to manipulate aspects of the internal grammatical structure sentences.

Syntactic awareness is a part of metalinguistic skills. Cain (2007) mentions that because it concerns with the ability to consider the structure rather than the meaning sentence, it can aid students' ability to detect and correct word recognition errors. Moreover, Bowey (1987) mentions that syntactic awareness may be enhance their comprehension monitoring abilities. According to Brimo and Apel (2017) syntactic awareness is measured by conducting two tasks: (a) a grammatical correction task, which required students to correct an orally-presented sentence that contained errors on subject-verb agreement and (b) a word-order correction task, which required students to rearrange words to create a grammatically correct

sentence. The parameters of syntactic awareness are assessed through two paradigms (Davidson et al., 2010) which are identification and correction. An identification paradigm is used to identify a correct grammar while a correction paradigm is used by correcting ungrammatical sentences .

2.3 Syntactic structures in Bahasa Indonesia

Syntax is a branch of linguistic that addresses the internal structure of sentence (Manaf, 2009). Aprilia (2014) also adds that syntax is also called sentence science that describes the relationship between elements of language to form a sentence. It focuses on the discussion of phrases, clauses, sentences as systemic unity. In this study, a phrase is the smallest unit meanwhile sentence is the largest unit. Syntax needs to be studied because it learns the sentence form which is the smallest complete language unit. Syntax relates to other language elements that are related to the constituent elements, such as phoneme, word, and so on.

English language has become a much studied by students. However, the structure in English is different with Bahasa Indonesia. First, the syntactic pattern in Bahasa Indonesia generally consists of subject (S), predicate (P), object (O), and adverb (K). Second, Putrayasa (2015) mentions that Bahasa Indonesia is still use a root-base language. He also adds that it does not have any gender. As for example, 'Dia suka membaca buku' . The word *dia* doesn't refer to any man or woman. Meanwhile in English, it is clear that it must be 'he/she likes to read a book'. Third, there are no articles in Bahasa Indonesia (a, an, or the), however in Bahasa Indonesia the prefix *se-* can act in similar manner such as *sebuah* or *a piece*. In Bahasa Indonesia, the article can be skipped because the role is not important. Fourth, Bahasa Indonesia does not have a plural concept, to express the concept of something being 'more than one'. As for example, in English 'I have three apples', meanwhile in Bahasa Indonesia 'saya mempunyai tiga apel'.

2.4 Children's Language Development

Genishi (2011) mentions that children in 12 months developing many foundations that underpin speech and language development. Then, in the third year and so on children will understand more than they say. Language development supports children's ability to communicate, to understand feeling, to support thinking and problem solving. The

understanding of language is the critical step in literacy, and it is the basis for learning to read and write (Casanave, 1994). Language develops with physical growth and cognitive development (Piaget, 2008). Its development is more complex to be understood.

According to Piaget and Vygotsky, children's language development consists of eight stages (Piaget & Vygotsky, as cited in Tarigan, 2011, p.41). The first stage is babbling (prelinguistic, aged 0.0 – 0.5). In this stage, babies have been given the feeling to have social interaction and language. The second stage is "nonsense word" which happens when babies reach the age of 0.5 – 1.0. In this stage, babies start to babble which is more language-like but is still not clear. This stage occurs specifically in 6-9 months of age. The third stage is one-word sentence which specifically occurs in 18-20 months of age. In this stage, babies can express anything without limited words. The fourth is two-word sentence's stage, specifically at the age of 2-3. This stage is called telegraphic speech where the children use nominalism, adverb or adjective. The fifth is grammar development stage which specifically occurs at the age of 3-4. This stage is where the children start to improve their grammar. The sixth stage is pre-adult grammar, which specifically occurs at the age of 4-5. This stage shows that children start to produce complex sentence. The last stage is full competence stage, which occurs specifically at the age of 5-7. In this stage, children acquire language like adult although it is limited in a number of vocabularies.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employs Quantitative method. As Cresswell (2014) mentions that quantitative method contains numeric descriptions or opinions of population by studying that population. This method is to test the impact of the treatment on an outcome. Babbie (2010) adds that quantitative method also emphasizes objective measurement and numerical analysis of data using computational techniques. The data of the study is processed by using excel 2010.

The data was collected from two Kindergarten that consists of forty-five students; kindergarten A was about 21 students, and kindergarten B was about 24 students. They were chosen because the requirement of the researcher to find out syntactic awareness in early childhood. These students were five and six years old, and most of them could read and others could not. The data was collected using instrument to meet the purpose of the study. In this

study, there were two ways of collecting the data: syntactic awareness task and observation 3-4 hours a day by recording the children's performance during the execution of task. The task of syntactic awareness was in the form of instrument to identify and correct jumbled sentences.

There were two stages of collecting the data. First, the tasks were tested to know whether they work out, had the mistakes, or need revision. After deciding the best tasks, children were tested in the class. Second, the execution of the tasks was recorded with Android for observing children's syntactic performance. The recorded data shows all the responses and production. In detail, children came to the class in turn and individually. The teacher gave the writer a room for the test, and let the writer did the test during school's activity and the test were lasted for about a month. Before testing the children, the writer broke the ice by asking what games they like, how old they were, and then following their conversation. In the task, children were first asked to tell what the images in the picture were. It is the stimulus that would raise the children's knowledge of the characters in the pictures. Second, the children were asked what the characters do in the pictures. This question was used to validate whether the children really know what the characters were doing in the pictures. Then, the writer gave the flashcard that consists of a jumbled sentence. After that, the writer read the jumbled sentence and asked whether it sounded 'enak' (good) or 'gak enak' (not good). When the children said 'enak', the writer gave the next picture and sentence. However, when the student said 'gak enak' (not good), the writer asked the student to correct the sentence through flashcards that have been given.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section describes the findings of the assessment test of syntactic awareness in Bahasa Indonesia. This study consists of two section tasks, the first was assess active sentence and the second was assess passive sentence. Both of active and passive sentences contain two assessments respectively; identification and correction.

The total number of forty-five students who took the test was 76, 9% students answered active sentences correctly. Meanwhile, in passive sentences the students answered 67, 8% sentences correctly. Dardjowodjojo (2005) mentions that in Bahasa Indonesia, passive sentence patterns are often used instead of active sentence patterns. Hence, children are more dominant using passive sentences than

active sentences. However, the findings show different. Based on the test's result, students are more familiar with active sentence rather than passive sentence.

In Kindergarten A, results in active sentence task are 78, 9% students can identify wrong sentences, and 78, 1% students can correct the jumbled sentence. In passive sentence task, 80, 9% students can identify wrong sentences, and 55, 9% students can correct the jumbled sentence. Meanwhile, in Kindergarten B, results in active sentence task are 92,1% students can identify wrong sentences, and 57,9% students can correct the jumbled sentence. In passive sentence task, 95, 8% students can identify wrong sentences, and 35, 9% students can correct the jumbled sentence. Then, the total number of students that can answer the test is 73, 6% for Kindergarten A and 71,3% for Kindergarten B. Some of the students can identify which sentence is wrong, but they confuse how to put the words into the right order.

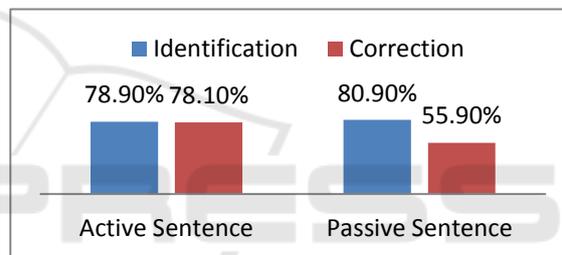


Figure 1: Kindergarten A.

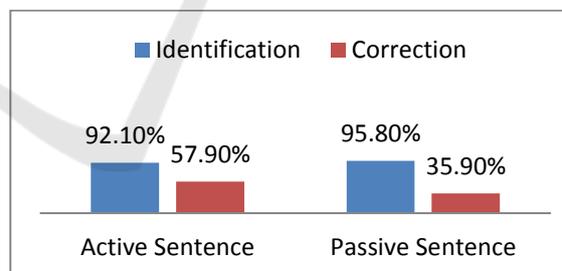


Figure 2: Kindergarten B.

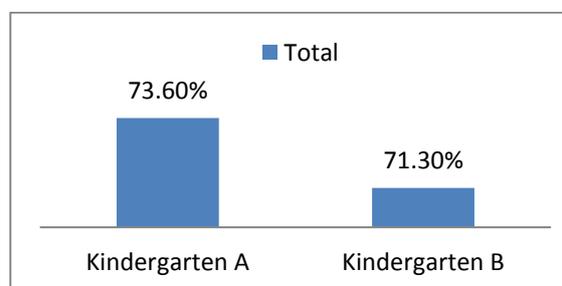


Figure 3: Total Percentage of two Kindergartens.

5 CONCLUSION

As explained previously, this study assesses students' syntactic awareness in Bahasa Indonesia. The quantitative data were analysed by using MS. Excel 2010. According to the result, it can be concluded that children ages 5-6 years have had a high syntactic awareness. It can be seen from the test results that children are able to answer more than 50% of the answers correctly. The finding is similar with Nation and Snowling (2000), that children are able to answer active sentence rather than passive sentence. In other way, the students were had difficulties in correcting jumbled sentence, specifically on passive sentence.

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