

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the introductory section of this study. The contents of this chapter cover the background to the study, research questions, aims of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, research methods, clarification of terms, organization of the paper, and concluding remarks.

1.1. Background to the Study

Syntactic awareness as the predictor of reading comprehension has an important role to measure preschool students' cognitive development. Even though these 5- and 6-year-old children are in stage 5 with full competence and have acquired full language development, their language development does not guarantee their awareness of language itself (metalinguistic awareness). Then, to develop metalinguistic awareness, especially syntactic awareness, parents begin to teach early reading and normally send their children to a kindergarten for better education in their ages. In the kindergarten, they keep developing in metalinguistic awareness and accumulating a large number of vocabularies in line with the social activity and maturation (Tarigan, 2011).

However, preschool curriculum focusing on playing, even for communication development, becomes a problem when elementary schools nowadays require reading ability (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Luar Sekolah dan Pemuda Departemen Pendidikan Nasional, 2004; Karli, 2010). As is known, elementary schools require pupils to be able to read for digesting the materials. In the Regulations of National Education Minister of the Indonesian Republic No. 58/2009, language teaching for 5- and 6-year-old students covers three aspects: language reception, speaking, and literacy. If children should be taught early reading and writing, the consideration lies in the children readiness psychologically and linguistically. However, the preschool curriculum in Indonesia has less empirical evidence to measure to what extent children are aware of and perceive Indonesian as having formal structures.

To fulfill all those criteria, children should have syntactic awareness to help them in comprehension and literacy, both reading and listening. Tunmer and Hoover define syntactic awareness as a metalinguistic skill for manipulating internal aspects of grammatical structures of sentences (cited in Center, 2005). Syntactic awareness in this case has the important role as the prerequisite of comprehension and reading (Nation and Snowling, 2000; Tausch, 2012; Guo *et al.*, 2011; Cain, 2007; Brimo and Apple, 2011; Brimo, 2011; Bowey, 1986). When preschool students learn to read, they are required to process and construct syntax as an object of manipulation which has a system. Previous research proved the positive effects of syntactic awareness in understanding a spoken language (Durgunoglu & Oney, 2000), language comprehension (Brimo, 2011), and writing (Plaza and Cohen, 2003; Tong and McBride, 2015).

However, previous research in the Indonesian context only touched on phonological awareness (see Mazka, 2014), and there is still less empirical evidence showing children's syntactical awareness and to what extent to support the preschool curriculum. Tsang and Stokes (2001) also insist that metalinguistic awareness, including syntactic awareness, is mostly applied in English. Some are applied in other languages such as China (Guo, 2008; Chung *et al.*, 2013), French (Plaza and Cohen, 2003), Malay (Liow and Lee, 2004), and Urdu (Davidson, *et.al.*, 2010). Dardjowidjojo (2000) suggests that research on metalinguistic awareness needs to be conducted in Indonesian context. The whole point of reading is comprehension, which makes connections between what is read, and what is already known. By understanding the text, then acquiring information runs smoothly (Mikulecky and Jeffries, 1998).

Children's development and education are such an important issue to determine their next autonomy (Rahman, 2009) and have the influence for the elementary school (Karli, 2010). This research, in the end, investigated children's syntactic awareness to provide the empirical evidence on their language development and proved the external factors such as bilingualism and birth order in relation to syntactic awareness. Delving into children's syntactic awareness and its factors also have the implication to know how far children, with their linguistic

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competence, process Indonesian by identifying and correcting jumbled sentences for their readiness to read and enter elementary schools. Because language is the media for other accumulation of knowledge, this research on syntactic awareness in preschool students is important to determine their capability to comprehend, read, and digest teachers' utterances (Guo, 2008).

1.2. Research Questions

The study was aimed at addressing the following research questions:

1. How is preschool students' syntactic awareness in identifying and correcting intransitive, transitive, ditransitive, and semitransitive structures?
2. Do bilingualism and birth order influence syntactic awareness?

1.3. Aims of the Study

This study focused on two important questions to address children's syntactic awareness. Particularly, this study was aimed at investigating:

1. preschool students' syntactic awareness in identifying and correcting intransitive, transitive, ditransitive, and semitransitive structures;
2. whether bilingualism and birth order influence syntactic awareness.

1.4. Scope of the Study

This research only focused on assessing children's syntactic awareness through their ability to correct and identify the sentences in the level of verbal structures such as intransitive, transitive, ditransitive, and semitransitive. By assessing children's syntactic awareness, this research would concern their language comprehension and development in preschool to provide the empirical evidence.

In this study, the structures of Indonesian for the syntactic awareness tasks were in the simple active sentences for the efficiency of task management, time, and validity. To delve many other types would need the longitudinal studies such as the various sentences of affirmative, question, negative, commands, or other types like subjunctive, conditional sentences and so on.

On the other hand, children easily avoided and got stressed in many reading and listening tasks with various structures at the same time as is explained

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by Wray *et al.* (1998) about research on children. In fact, they still had difficulties in much more complex sentences. Therefore, to limit this study, the parameters which were used covered active simple sentences only as were found by Dardjowidjojo (2000), not complex and compound sentences with subordinating and coordinating conjunctions.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The result of this study is expected to give the significance theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the significance of this study is primarily to contribute to the evaluation of Indonesian children's syntactic awareness for language comprehension. The result of this study is also beneficial to give the description and input to the theory of child language development, especially syntactic awareness in Indonesian context. This study can be regarded as a pilot test to pioneer the instruments to assess syntactic awareness in Indonesian context because the theoretical backgrounds of Indonesian syntactic awareness do not probably provide the sequential data and the metalinguistic instruments from previous research.

Practically, this study, as a result, can give the empirical evidence leading to the description and recommendations on children's linguistic development as a consideration to improve the preschool curriculum. For parents and teachers, they can also take into account the idea of syntactic awareness from this study to make and manage children activities based on enhancing syntactic awareness. Indirectly, parents and teachers know how important it is for children to have the aspect of syntactic awareness in literacy as the preparation for elementary schools.

1.6. Research Methods

1.6.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed method (qualitative and quantitative). This study also employed descriptive statistics and *t*-test to help enrich the qualitative data from the instruments and the other data. The reason for

choosing this method was to know children's syntactic awareness and their backgrounds, bilingualism and birth order, affecting syntactic awareness.

1.6.2. Data Collection

This study lasted for one month and investigated 19 preschool students in a kindergarten in North Bandung. They were given two syntactic awareness tasks: visual tasks and audio tasks. Then, the supplemental data were collected from their parents to know the backgrounds of the preschool students through the questionnaires. For the execution, the situation and the children were observed by recorders in a netbook for the supplemental data such as response time and production findings.

1.6.3. Data Analysis

After conducting research, all data were analyzed by calculating percentages of every verbal structure category and *t*-test in the end to see the patterns. In addition, preschool students' performance and information on bilingualism and birth order were also described in percentages, and the audio task was also counted for response time. Those percentages were interpreted and synthesized in line with the previous theories and research.

1.7. Clarification of Terms

There are some of the important concepts and terms that are applied in this present study. Those terms are as keypoints and clarification of the meanings.

1. Metalinguistic awareness is defined by Bowey as the ability to construct and manipulate one's language requiring the language system (rather than the meaning) treated as the object of thought (Center, 2005).
2. Syntactic awareness is defined by Tunmer and Hoover as a metalinguistic skill for manipulating internal aspects of grammatical structures of sentences (Center, 2005).
3. Linguistic knowledge is the talents for speaking well and understanding competently (Gleason and Ratner, 1993).

4. Language development is the development of production and comprehension of language to be linguistically competent individual (Harley, 2005).
5. Response time is time spent by children to identify and correct ungrammatical sentences.
6. Syntax is the rules of word order of a language (Harley, 2005).

1.8. Organization of the Paper

This paper is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 presents the *introduction* consisting of the background of the present study, research questions, aims of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, research method, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper.

Chapter 2 presents *literature review* covering syntactic awareness, significance of syntactic awareness, factors influencing syntactic awareness and development, syntactic structures in Indonesian, language development, and previous studies on this topic.

Chapter 3 presents *methodology* or the way this study obtains the data through some of the procedures. This chapter covers formulation of problem, research design, participants, data collection with instruments and procedure, and data analysis.

Chapter 4 presents *findings and discussion* to elaborate and analyze the data regarding the children's syntactic awareness and the interpretation of the data in the discussion. This chapter covers the results of syntactic awareness in the visual identification and the audio correction; production and comprehension; and factors influencing syntactic awareness.

Lastly, chapter 5 is *conclusion and suggestions* which conclude this study as the synthesis from the introduction, literature review, methodology, and findings and discussion. After that, this chapter elaborates the strength and the drawbacks of this study to give the recommendation for future research and for teachers.

