

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents some general information regarding the present study. It includes the background of the study, formulation of problems, aims of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, research methodology as well as clarification of several related terms. Furthermore, at the end of this chapter, there is also organization of the paper as a general description of how this paper is organized.

1.1 Background of the study

The period in which children start to enter their first formal school, such as kindergarten is interesting to be investigated. Kindergarten is expected to help students develop their potentials in acquiring language skills. Language skills will help the children to understand words, sentences, and the relationship between spoken and written language (Karmila, 2012). Furthermore, language skills support children in socializing with other people and in learning from their surroundings. Theoretically, by age five, children essentially master the sound and grammatical system 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. The first five years of life are critically important for the development of language.

Language development becomes an important component, especially for children in early childhood. Therefore, it is important for them to acquire reading or writing skills. According to Gracia (in Silviany, 2016, p.1), children's language development is characterized by the mastery of sound elements (phonological), word structures (morphology), and sentence structures (syntax). If children have acquired these three components, then the target of future success will be achieved. Even so, in this study syntactic awareness of children aged five to six has its concerns. The focuses on measuring syntactic awareness are on the sentence level which requires

the language user to manipulate the grammatical well-formedness and syntactic structure of sentences (Tong, Deacon, & Chain, 2014).

Some previous studies have discussed syntactic awareness in early childhood in English form. For example, syntactic awareness has been included in Davidson, Rasche and Pervez's (2010) studies investigating 3 – 5 year old bilingual children. The study 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. Another study, Plaza (2001) examined two metalinguistic skills; syntactic awareness and phonological awareness. The study was performed longitudinally from kindergarten to grade one. In the study, Plaza (2001) also showed the connection between syntax and phonology. The result showed that the kindergarten children who exhibited early syntactic skills and syllable processing made particularly significant progress in consonant identification after one year of reading instruction. Those studies indicate the significance of the children's language features at bases for their future language development. Indonesia is one of the countries in which the children is under attention (UNESCO, 2016)

As a way to identify children literature development, some relevant studies have been conducted in Indonesia. The findings of those studies only include measurement of children's syntactic awareness. For example, Impuni (2012) measured syntactic awareness to children aged 5 by retelling stories. The result shows that the children produced different complex and compound sentences. Meanwhile, Komara (2016) focused on syntactic structures in Indonesian active sentences (intransitive, transitive, ditransitive, and semi-transitive) and assessed 19 preschool students to identify and correct jumbled sentences through audiovisual. He found that the students acquired high results all over and revealed that there was no difference between the visual identification and audio correction. Therefore, he concluded that preschool students have developed their syntactic awareness. Thus, this study adds to investigate language features to contribute to the existing studies in syntactic awareness in Indonesian context. The study attempts to investigate children's

awareness of identifying and correcting active and passive sentence forms. This study only focus on children aged 5-6 at two kindergartens: *Calistung* kindergarten and *Non-Calistung* kindergarten. Thus, besides investigating children in identification and correction skills, this study also attempts to find out social characteristics that contribute to the children's performance in identifying and correcting the sentences.

1.2 Formulation of problems

This study reveals children's (aged 5-6) awareness of syntactic structure in identifying and correcting active and passive forms. The focus of this study is intended to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are children aged 5-6 able to identify and correct active and passive form?
2. What social characteristics do contribute to the children's ability in identifying active and passive sentences?

1.3 Aims of the study

This study focuses on the questions that are reflected from the answer of the assessment tests, questionnaires, and an interview found in the *findings* and *discussion*. The aims of the present study are to describe and assess:

1. The ability of children to identify and correct active and passive forms.
2. The social characteristics that affect children's performance in identifying and correcting skills.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The present study focuses on assessing syntactic awareness in early childhood. The participants are Indonesian kindergarten students aged 5-6. The data which are used are as follow: The assessment test use pictures and flashcards to find out how the children can arrange jumbled sentences. Furthermore, in order to get social characteristics data, the writer handed questionnaires to the parents and had an interview with them. The language is in Indonesian language, therefore the students and parents can understand all the instructions well.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is purposively designed to investigate syntactic awareness in early childhood age 5-6. This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical benefits as follow:

This study is important for two reasons. Theoretically, this study is expected to give contribution to children's syntactic awareness study, especially in Indonesian context. Furthermore, the present study is expected to help the other researcher who in the same field. Then, the practical benefit of the present study is to give contribution to teacher in kindergarten for knowing children's syntactic awareness. Moreover, the present study also expected to help children improving their syntactic awareness skill.

1.6 Research Methodology

In this part, research design, data collection, and data analysis will be discussed as follow:

1.6.1 Research Design

This study is a descriptive quantitative method towards the scores taken from the instrument. Quantitative method becomes relevant because the present research uses tools or the instrument for collecting numerical data. Calculation of mean, percentage, and standard deviation are performed by using Microsoft Excel.

1.6.2 Participants of the Study

Participants of this study are two kindergartens in Bandung, consisting 42 students (12 each). Then, the parents are involved as they provide supplementary data that will later help explaining the emerging patterns of the children's data.

1.6.3 Data Collection

The present study was conducted at two kindergartens that are located in Bandung. The total numbers of students were 42 students. The two kindergartens are chosen based on activities that are implemented by the teachers in the classroom. The teachers on kindergarten A do not teach the students how to read and write.

Meanwhile, the teachers at kindergarten B teach the students how to read, write, and even count numbers. The students were five and six years old, some of them were could not read. They were chosen because of the requirement of the researcher to find out syntactic awareness in early childhood. Tsang and Stokes (2001) and Tausch (2012) (cited in Komara, 2016), mention that age of five is a phase in which the syntactic awareness of the children are appears. The present study was lasted in two months, from August to October. The test that was given to the children was consisting of pictures and jumbled sentences. All the pictures were based on cartoon for children. Then, the interview with parents is needed in order to find out social characteristics of children's performance in identifying and correcting active and passive sentences.

1.6.4 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using descriptive statistics and presented in the form of tables. The data are the main instrument to collect the quantitative data. Meanwhile, the interview is presented in the form of descriptive explanation to fulfill descriptive data.

1.7 Clarification of Term

To avoid ambiguity and misunderstanding, the writer will describe some key terms existing in this study.

1. Metalinguistic is the ability to reflect on and manipulate the structural features of language (Nagy & Anderson, 1995);
2. Metalinguistic awareness is typically defined as the ability to both reflect upon and manipulate language structures. (Tong, Deacon, & Cain, 2014);
3. Syntactic awareness is a metalinguistic skill that is defined as the conscious ability to manipulate or judge word-order within the context of a sentence based on the application of grammatical rules (Bowey & Patel, 1988 cited in Cain, 2007);

4. Early childhood is a critical stage of children development that forms the foundation for children's future well-being and learning. (UNICEF, 2014);
5. Calistung is the abbreviation of *Membaca, Menulis, Menghitung* (Reading, Writing and Counting). It is the ability to read, write and count as basic skills for children who have not entered education level (Wulandari, 2009 cited in Widayati, 2013).

1.8 Organization of Paper

The present study is organized in five chapters. The chapters are as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction. The first chapter introduces background of the study, formulation of problems, aims of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, research methodology, clarification of terms, organization of the paper, and concluding remarks.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework. This chapter discusses the relevant theoretical framework of the present study. It is subdivided into seven parts, namely Syntax in General, Syntactic Awareness, Syntactic Acquisition, Syntactic awareness and Syntactic acquisition, Significances of Syntactic Awareness, Active and Passive form in Indonesian, Previous Studies of Syntactic Awareness, and concluding remarks.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology. This chapter focuses on the methodological aspects of the present study. It covers three main parts: Research design, Data collection, data analysis, and concluding remarks.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussions. This chapter presents the present findings and discussion of the present study. There are three main parts on this chapter: findings, discussion, and concluding remarks.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Suggestions. This is the last chapter of the present study and it consists of conclusion and several recommendations for future research and teachers.

1.9 Concluding Remarks

This chapter presented the underlying principles of the study that covers the background of the study, formulation of problems, aims of the study, scope of the study, significance of the study, research methodology, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper. The next chapter, chapter 2, elaborates the relevant theoretical framework on syntactic awareness to the present study.