

ENGLISH SYNTAX ACQUISITION ORDER OF INDONESIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEARNERS: AN ANALYSIS OF GRAMMATICAL FUNCTION OF THIRD AND SIXTH GRADERS

Syifa’ Khuriyatuz Zahro
syifazahro@unisda.ac.id
Universitas Islam Darul ‘Ulum Lamongan

Abstract. Linguistics’ research has proved that the acquisition order for foreign-language is not a static order but less consistent. Therefore, teachers of foreign language urgently need to understand the acquisition order of linguistics components to achieve an appropriate learning outcome, especially on syntactic mastery of the target language. For Indonesian learners, English sentence which employs verbs as its predicate is one of most complex linguistics component to learn and apply in their writing. The absence of a copula verb in Indonesian sentences which mostly ignored by some Indonesian learners affects the problem. Therefore, this study examines the English syntax acquisition order toward third and sixth grade of Indonesian learners in a descriptive qualitative approach. The participant is two learners of the third and sixth grade of Islamic Elementary School Lamongan who are requested to compose an essay writing three times to further analysis based on their grammatical function. The data is therefore in the form of writing produced by the participants about family, holiday and friend. The result indicates that both learners acquire five sentence patterns in their stage; they are S-V, S-V-sP, S-V-dO, S-V-dO-A, and S-V-A-sP. Meanwhile, the sentence pattern of S-V-sP is in the first order of acquisition by both levels of learners, while the last order acquired is the most complex one, S-V-A-sP.

Keywords: Acquisition Order, English Syntax, Syntactic Analysis, grammatical Function

INTRODUCTION

Unlike children acquisition of English as a first language, especially in mastering the syntax which can be acquired naturally through contact and interaction by an adult with no formal guidance (Thornton, 2016), learners’ syntactic mastery of a second language (L2) or foreign language is much more complex. It happens because the acquisition order of L2 is less consistent and unfixed. Numerous learners’ first languages (L1), including Bahasa Indonesia for Indonesian learners, influenced the unfixing acquisition order of L2

English and Indonesian syntactic norm are different. The students’ high exposure to grammatical differences between both languages leads to the difficulties to acquire the English grammar (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014). Indonesian young learners mostly ignore copula verb after a subject predicative as a predicate in writing English sentence, like *my book white* which is missing the verbal “is”. Frequently, they also overlook some articles “a” and “the” as a subject to form a noun phrase and prepositional phrase. Additionally, to construct an adjective phrase, they tend to pay no attention to the conversion between the adjective followed by the noun in English phrase which is the reverse of Indonesian, such as *a beautiful house* for *rumah yang indah, rumah* (house) *yang indah* (beautiful). The confusion is evident for Indonesian learners to master English grammar.

Indonesian learners broadly faced a phenomenon of the complicated acquisition of English Grammar, primarily for the third and sixth graders of Islamic Elementary School Salafiyah, Cungkup, Indonesia. They reluctantly produce an oral English production, but they achieve the highest score in the test. However, the items were reading and grammar materials and did not involve a productive skill which is an obligatory output of learning a foreign language. As well, the outcome of English grammar mastery is productive skills; speaking and writing. Since the learners are in the silent period which may result in anxiety, embarrassment and unconfident to talk, thus, writing is the best way to expose their grammar mastery in English.

This paper presents an inquiry to examine the order of acquisition of English sentence structure by learners at different stages of development in writing based on grammatical function in English. For this reasons, the questions of the present study are 1) how is the acquisition order of grammatical function of English sentence structure produced by the learners of grade three and six? and 2) what is the English syntax acquisition order of Indonesian learners at class three and six? These questions address the issue of the apparent learners' syntactic mastery representation which is expected to be beneficial for English teachers' of elementary school particularly, and the parents largely as a reference to further develop an appropriate grammar teaching for specific learners' stages.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Acquisition

One of most intriguing phenomena studied by contemporary linguists is children's acquisition of language (O'Grady, Archibald, Aronoff, & Rees-Miller, 2017). The study of acquisition has numerous concerns about linguistics area including phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, discourse, and pragmatics. In fact, linguists look at the study of those concerns about grammar to describe the rules of language. The acquisition of syntax, indeed, comes along with the acquisition of language. In acquiring the first language, the grammatical rule seems can acquire unconsciously rather than learned, but it is different from second or foreign language acquisition which is known well as SLA.

SLA is the study of how additional languages are acquired which, then, is a significant area of inquiry in both general and applied linguistics. The acquisition of grammatical rule of SLA is a salient matter of concern. The reason for the grammatical acquisition is that matured language users can produce and understand unlimited sentences (O'Grady et al., 2017). Besides, children who acquire grammatical rules are prone to produce the second language well and better rather than those who memorize words and sentences. They may produce errors as an attempt to construct grammatical rules.

A theory of SLA which concern on grammar acquisition order as suggested by Chomsky (2002) who assert that children master simple sentence first then the complex ones. It is similar to Krashen and Terrell (1998) hypothesis known as Natural Hypothesis who state that acquisition order of structures in language acquisition is reasonably predictable.

Syntactic Analysis

Studying syntax is studying the sentence. A sentence makes a complete thought, sense, and also has meaning. English has common simple sentences such as *John smokes cigars* which is comprise a single independent clause (Radford, 2009). A syntactic analysis means to describe the constituent of a sentence in grammatically. It involves breaking down the sentences into its parts then analyzing the grammatical function they have.

Grammatical function as suggested by Hudson (2010) is the roles of words representing the constituent of given sentence structure. The most common types of constituents or roles are subject (S), verbal (V), direct object (dO), indirect object (iO), subject predicative (sP), object predicative (oP) and adverbial (A) (Glossary of grammatical terms used in Hasselgård, Lysvåg, & Johansson, 2012).

Subject (S) is a clause constituent which comes along with the verb in all complete sentences. A noun phrase recognizes the subject typically. It generally positioned before the verb, at the head of the sentence. The subject defines a '*doer of an action*' (Hasselgård et al., 2012). Such as; in *John eats a banana*, *My mother got a new car*, *my father and I sleep*, *Tomorrow is a holiday*, *To go to Bromo is easy*, and *Driving car is fun*.

Verbal(V), also known as a predicate, is a constituent which always realized by a verb or verb phrase follows the subject (Hasselgård et al., 2012). For instance: *I love my family*, *we want to play*, *we will go around the city*, and *she deliver sand picks me*.

The object comes after the subject and the verbal/ predicate. English sentence has two kinds of objects; the direct object (dO) and indirect object (iO). The direct object comes in addition to the transitive verbal constructions which usually represents somebody or something that is affected by the action denoted by the verb. It is typically realized by a noun like *a dog bit its owner*, *I received a present*, and *He made a mistake*. Meanwhile, iO is a constituent that comes in addition to a subject and a direct object placed between them. It refers to a beneficiary of something (Hasselgård et al., 2012). For example, *I gave my girlfriend a ring*, *I asked her a question*, and *He did me a favour*.

Subject predicative (sP) is an element that comes in addition to a subject and a copula (two-place) verb which is realized by an adjective phrase or a noun phrase, e.g. *she is happy*, *he felt a fool*, and *the soup tastes nice*. Object predicative (oP) is a constituent occurs after a complex transitive verb and a direct object (Hasselgård et al., 2012). For instance: *they found the book disappointing*, *we painted the chair blue*, and *they named her Victoria*.

Adverbial (A) is a constituent which can easily attach to any clause pattern. Adverbials can be realized with adverbs, adverb phrases, noun phrases, prepositional phrases, or subordinate clauses (Hasselgård et al., 2012). Such as *my father bought a car yesterday* and *I am sitting on the floor uncomfortably*.

METHODS

This study is qualitative research which is conducted through intense and or prolonged contact with participants in a naturalistic setting to investigate the everyday and or extraordinary lives of individuals, groups, societies, and organizations (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). This research is qualitative because the data collected are mostly in the form of words, phrases, sentences or utterances rather than statistic numbers.

Since the study leads to determine a specific situation of the acquisition order of English sentence structure, such research is a descriptive study. The descriptive analysis incorporates a detailed description of people and places to carry the narrative. An investigation of this mode might convey a typical day in the life of an individual (Creswell, 2015, p. 274). Thus, the descriptive study aims to describe the data obtained as data found in the field.

The participant is two learners of the third and sixth grade of Islamic elementary school Cungkup, Lamongan, Indonesia. The participants are selected because they are considered to confront to a silent period while learning or even acquiring English as their foreign language. The result of English test in which, both of them achieved the highest score is the evidence by which the selection of typical silent learners. Both children are at different stages of English mastery. In this study, the participant composed an essay writing three times and then collected it to the researcher to further analysis based on grammatical function. The data is therefore in the form of writing made by the participants about family, holiday and friend.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The six essays, made by the participants, have 68 sentences which then analyze based on the grammatical function to find the sentence pattern constructed. Among the 68 sentences, six sentence patterns found by grammatical function analysis from both learners' levels, the third and sixth grade. The sentence patterns found are; S-V, S-V-sP, S-V-dO, S-V-dO-A, and S-V-A-

sP. The sentence patterns found are subsequently analyzed based on the grammatical errors and classified into correct, less correct and incorrect.

The most frequent pattern occurs in the third grades’ compositions are S-V-sP. About 10 sentences constructed from such pattern. Among 28 sentences composed by the third grader, 11 sentences are correct, 11 sentences are incorrect lexically but grammatically correct, but six sentences are incorrect both grammatically and lexically. Although the most frequent pattern used is S-V-sP, the students mostly have a correct sentence in constructing a sentence with S-V-dO pattern. The result confirms that students made more mistakes in the sentence with S-V-sP than S-V-dO.

Furthermore, the student in sixth grade frequently constructs S-V-sP sentence pattern. From the total of 45 sentences written by the sixth grader, 18 sentences are correct, 14 sentences are incorrect lexically but grammatically correct, but 13 sentences are incorrect both grammatically and lexically. Although the most frequent pattern used is S-V-sp, the students mostly have a correct sentence in constructing a sentence with S-V-dO pattern. This result is synonymous with the analysis result of the third-grade essay.

The grammatical errors made by the participant are mostly the ignorance of copula verb as verbal/ V.

- a) *He funny*
- b) *She a housewife*

Each of sentences in a) and b) has incorrect grammatical and lexical form. Both sentences are missing the verbal function in the form of the copula verb *is* which is grammatically incorrect and lexically blank.

Also, another lexical error which classified into less correct are as depicted in example c) and d) below:

- c) *I have mother*
- d) *Name is Abid*

Abovementioned sentences are grammatically correct but lexically severe. The lexical missing may have no significant effect on the sentence construction. The absence of article or determiner *a* in c) and the disappeared nouns-headed of *his* does not make any impact to the grammatical function. The sentences still have a complete grammatical function; a subject-verbal-direct object in c) and subject-verbal-subject predicative in d). Thus, they are considered less-correct.

The participants are mostly able to construct a correct form of a sentence with a complete grammatical function.

- e) *She loves me*
- f) *My name is Azzah*

Both sentences constructed from a subject-verbal-direct object in e) and subject-verbal-subject predicative in f) with proper grammar use. Therefore, both are the examples of correct sentences. The table is the distribution of frequency and the level of English sentence based on grammatical function on the participant essays.

Table 1: The distribution of frequency of grammatical and lexical errors on the third and sixth-grade essays

No	Grammatical Function	3 rd Grader			Total	Freq Rank	6 th Grader			Total	Freq Rank
		C	LC	IC			C	LC	IC		
1.	S-V	2	3	-	5	3 rd	3	2	-	5	4 th
2.	S-V-dO	4	3	1	8	2 nd	9	3	1	13	2 nd

No	Grammatical Function	3 rd Grader			Total	Freq Rank	6 th Grader			Total	Freq Rank
		C	LC	IC			C	LC	IC		
3.	S-V-sP	3	3	4	10	1 st	3	6	9	18	1 st
4.	S-V-dO-A	1	2	1	4	4 th	-	3	3	6	3 rd
5.	S-V-A-sP	1	-	-	1	5 th	3	-	-	3	5 th
Total		11	11	6	28		18	14	13	45	

Based on above table of distribution, the acquisition order can be determined based on the frequency rank. This result indicates that Indonesian learners at third and sixth grade have a similar order in acquiring English syntax, especially in sentence pattern. The order shows the way the highest frequency of the sentence pattern is mostly acquired earliest of the entire sentence pattern. It means that the sentence pattern of S-V-sP is the first sentence pattern learned by the participant. The whole order of the level reveals the acquisition order of English sentence structure based on grammatical function for each student’s grade as depicted below:

Table 2: The acquisition order of English sentence of the third and sixth graders

Order	Acquisition order of 3 rd Grade	Acquisition order of 6 th Grade
1.	S-V-sP	S-V-sP
2.	S-V-dO	S-V-dO
3.	S-V	S-V-dO-A
4.	S-V-dO-A	S-V
5.	S-V-A-sP	S-V-A-sP

Above table indicates that there is the insignificant difference between English sentence pattern acquired by learners at third and sixth grade. The sentence pattern S-V-sP is frequently acquired by both levels of learners, while the last one is the most complex one, S-V-A-sP. This finding supported a theory of SLA by Chomsky (2002) and (Krashen & Tracy D. Terrell, 1998, p. 28) that children master simple sentence first then the complex ones. However, the most straightforward pattern, S-V is in the third and fourth order.

Mastery of grammar does not warrant a skilful use in writing. In fact, both participants have a good mastery of grammar proven by the highest score of the result. However, there are still some grammatical errors made. Most of the grammatical errors are in constructing phrases. The phrases are for instance in the form of a noun phrase, which is frequently missing the article or determiner either in the subject or direct object and copula verb which is often ignored by the learners. This finding reinforced Supriyatno (2013) and Sumaranama (2017) research on grammatical interference. L1 interference mostly dominates the errors which are influenced by where Indonesian syntax relies on no auxiliary in the verbal function. Such interference is consistent with some former scholar the research result that inter-lingual, intra-lingual, overgeneralization and rule ignorance are the factors cause such grammatical interference (Sari, 2017)

Furthermore, the absence of some grammatical function in the elementary school students, like indirect object (iO), object predicative (oP) is predictable. The function of iO mostly paraphrased into a prepositional phrase.

g) *Melissa gives a book to me*

h) *Melissa gives me a book.*

Instead of writing h) with S-V-iO-dO pattern, the participants tend to write g) sentence. Indonesian syntax once again affects the way the participants write the English sentence to form

a pattern, such as *aku memberi buku kepadamu* (I give a book for you) instead of *aku memberimu buku* (I give you a book). Therefore, they tend to ignore iO which is a complex sentence. In contrast, the participants tend to merely compose a simple sentence structure rather than the complex one. It once again reinforced Chomsky (2002) and (Krashen & Tracy D. Terrell, 1998, p. 28) theory that learners acquired L2 from the simple sentence structure to more complex one.

CONCLUSION

Based on above result and discussion, the conclusion drawn is that based on the grammatical function, the essay made by both participants, Indonesian learners at the third and sixth grade have five types of sentence pattern; S-V, S-V-sP, S-V-dO, S-V-dO-A, and S-V-A-sP. Additionally, the students of both third and sixth grade start writing English sentence from the simple structure to the more complex ones. The finding is similar to Chomsky (2002) and Krashen, and Terrel (1998, p. 28) claim that children master simple sentence first then the complex ones. Among the five sentence pattern, the acquisition order of English syntax by the third-grader listed as follow; 1) S-V-sP, 2) S-V-dO, 3) S-V, 4) S-V-dO-A and 5) S-V-A-sP, while the sixth grader's order denotes the similar order except for the order number 3) S-V-dO-A and 4) S-V. The finding is expected to be an initial description of the acquisition order of English syntax by Indonesian learners, especially the third and sixth graders which have insignificant different for English education generally and for elementary teachers particularly. Moreover, since the current research examined a limited number of participants in a specific level, it is suggested for the subsequent investigation to address a more significant amount of participant in different English level.

REFERENCE

- Chomsky, N. (2002). *Syntactic Structures* (2nd ed.). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Creswell, J. W. (2015). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Hasselgård, H., Lysvåg, P., & Johansson, S. (2012). *English Grammar: Theory and Use* (2nd ed.). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Hudson, R. A. (2007). *Language networks: The new Word Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Krashen, S. D., & Tracy D. Terrell. (1998). *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*. London: Prentice Hall Elt.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Long, M. H. (2014). Input Modification and Second Language Comprehension. In *An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research* (pp. 247–250). Routledge.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- O’Grady, W., Archibald, J., Aronoff, M., & Rees-Miller, J. (2017). *Contemporary Linguistics An Introduction* (7th ed.). Boston: Bedford.
- Radford, A. (2009). *Linguistics : an introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sari, H. M. (2017). A grammatical Interference from Indonesian into English translation. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Untan*, 6(2).

- Sumaranama, I. K. R. (2017). Native language interference in arranging English text by Indonesian Students. *Udhayana Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, (1), 1–11.
- Supriyanto, R. A. (2013). Grammatical Interference from English to Indonesian Language made by English native Speakers in Salatiga. *Register Journal*, 6(2), 271–289.
- Thornton, R. (2016). Children’s Acquisition of Syntactic Knowledge. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Linguistics*. Oxford University Press.