

Language Acquisition of A Bilingual Child Indonesian English

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Abstract: This research aims to examine syntactic development in children, especially in mastering sentences formed by children. The approach used is qualitative with a case study method, through systematic observation of language acquisition in Indonesian-English bilingual children. This research relies on the understanding that the syntactic development of bilingual children has unique characteristics, including the potential for transfer between languages that can influence sentence use patterns. The main focus is to identify the stages of syntactic development, from single-word utterances to complex sentences, as well as comparing the dynamics of first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition. The main data source in this research is a child named Mayesa Hafsa Kirana (MHK), the first daughter of the couple Retno Hening and Tatang, who studied the first and second languages simultaneously in a bilingual environment. This child grew up in a family environment that supported the consistent use of Indonesian and English, which allowed this research to explore the process of language acquisition in depth. Apart from that, the selection of subjects also takes into account the socio-cultural background that enriches the research context. Data was collected using three main instruments, namely notebooks, video recordings of Kirana telling stories, and interview results. Data collection methods include observation, interviews, and documentation. To analyze the data, researchers translated the words spoken into Indonesian with the help of a dictionary, especially for utterances that were ambiguous or unclear. The analysis technique used is an interactive analysis model. The results of the research show that the development of MHK language syntax in Indonesian and English is balanced, with transfer in the process of syntactic development.

Keywords: language acquisition, bilingual, children

1. Introduction

Language is the main tool humans use to communicate and convey information. As a complex symbol system, language is not only the main means of social interaction, but also a reflection of human cognition and culture. Therefore, the role of language has attracted the interest of researchers to study various aspects, including the process of language acquisition in children. Language acquisition refers to the internal processes that

occur in a child's brain when he begins to master his first language or mother tongue (L1). According to Chaer (2003:167), language acquisition is a natural process that allows children to learn and use language in unique ways. Simanjuntak (1987:153) strengthens this view by stating that language acquisition is a cognitive activity that takes place in a child's brain when he learns to understand and produce language. In this process, there are two aspects that play an important role, namely performance (actual ability to use language) and competence (in-depth knowledge of language structure).

The process of language acquisition in children is a dynamic journey and continues to develop as they get older. In early childhood, especially in the 0–6 year age range, children are at a critical phase for developing complex language skills. This ability includes aspects of syntax, semantics, morphology and phonology, all of which develop gradually (Mardhyana, 2020). In this phase, children learn to form simple to complex sentence patterns, and understand the meaning and structure of the language they use. However, language acquisition is not limited to the first language. In the context of bilingualism, children can also master a second language (L2), which adds a unique dimension to their language development.

Bilingualism is a person's ability to understand and use two languages actively. According to Tridinanti (2016:1), bilingualism does not only include the ability to speak, but also the ability to understand both languages. This phenomenon is commonly found in children, especially in families or environments where more than one language is used. Romaince (1995:183) identified that one of the main causes of bilingualism in children is the difference in language used by the two parents. In an article about bilingual education, Purcell and Lee (2020) emphasize that bilingualism involves the routine use of two languages, both in the home and community environment. Bilingual children show a unique ability to use these two languages in everyday communication contexts.

There are various factors that influence the acquisition of a second language in bilingual children. For example, having parents with a different mother tongue, living in an environment where two languages are actively used, being in a digloss society, moving to a new linguistic community, to educational or work demands that require mastery of more than one language (Purcell & Lee, 2020). Apart from that, Letts in his article *Becoming Bilingual* explains four types of language acquisition in bilingual children, namely simultaneous acquisition, sequential acquisition, language dominance and attrition, and interference.

This research focuses on sequential language acquisition, namely conditions where children first master the first language (L1), then learn the second language (L2). In early childhood, second language acquisition often follows a pattern that resembles the process of first language acquisition in monolingual children. However, in older children, the L2 acquisition process can be influenced by various factors, such as personality, ability to overcome obstacles, and certain learning strategies. This is relevant to the theory put forward by Genesee (2001), which states that bilingual children are able to develop two language systems simultaneously with distinctive development patterns.

As part of cognitive development, language acquisition is also closely related to children's social interactions. In a bilingual context, these interactions often involve the

use of both languages in different situations, allowing children to expand their vocabulary and syntactic structures. According to Oller and Eilers (2002), exposure to a rich bilingual environment can improve children's ability to distinguish the nuances and contexts of use of each language. This shows that social and environmental contexts play an important role in the formation of children's language skills. In addition, the importance of support from parents and caregivers in this process cannot be ignored. Research by Pearson (2002) shows that parents' active involvement in using a second language at home can increase children's motivation and success in mastering both languages. Thus, this research will not only look at syntactic development from a cognitive perspective, but also consider social factors that can influence language acquisition in bilingual children.

Based on this background, this research raises a problem formulation in the form of how bilingual children develop their syntax, especially in terms of their mastery of sentences. The aim of this research is to describe children's syntactic development in acquiring a first language (L1) and a second language (L2), as well as understanding the balance pattern between the two languages. It is hoped that this research can contribute to understanding the process of language acquisition in bilingual children, especially in the context of using Indonesian and English.

2. Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, which involves systematic observation of the language acquisition of Indonesian-English bilingual children. The main data source is a child named Mayesa Hafsa Kirana (MHK), the first daughter of the couple Retno Hening and Tatang, who is studying a first language (L1) and a second language (L2).

Data collection was carried out using three main instruments, namely notebooks, video documentation of Kirana telling stories, and interviews. The methods used in data collection include direct observation, structured interviews, and documentation to strengthen the validity of the data. In analyzing the data, the researcher translated the words spoken by the research subjects into Indonesian using a dictionary. The analysis technique applied is an interactive analysis model, which involves a process of data reduction, data presentation, and gradual conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

This approach is in line with other qualitative research that utilizes observation and documentation to understand language development in bilingual children. For example, Smith (2019) explains that a combination of interviews and visual documentation can provide deep insight into language acquisition in children who are in a bilingual environment. In addition, in accordance with Creswell's (2014) opinion, a qualitative approach allows in-depth exploration of language phenomena in the context of children's daily lives.

3. Results and Discussion

This research uses stages of children's syntactic development which are based on the general child language development model according to Clark and Clark (1977). This stage includes development from the production of one-word utterances, continuing with

two-word utterances, to multi-word utterances. In terms of language development, Mayesa Hafsa Kirana (MHK) showed a difference in achievement time between Indonesian and English, although the final results showed balanced development. In the acquisition of Indonesian, MHK begins to produce one-word utterances at the age of 9 months (0;9), two-word utterances are active at the age of 1 year 9 months (1;9), and multi-word utterances begin to be produced at the age of 2 years (2;0). Meanwhile, in English, one-word utterances begin to appear at the age of 1 year (1;0), two-word utterances at the age of 1 year 9 months (1;9), and multi-word utterances at the age of 2 years (2;0).

These results show that syntactically, the development of the MHK language in Indonesian and English takes place in parallel and in balance. Thus, the development of a second language (English) does not hinder the acquisition of a first language (Indonesian), but rather goes hand in hand. This supports the idea that bilingual children can develop two separate language systems, as proposed by Genesee (2001) in his theory of bilingualism in early childhood.

There are three main pieces of evidence that support the assumption that the MHK developed two distinct language systems. First, children are able to develop language sounds specific to each language. In Indonesian language speech, MHK uses phonemes and intonation typical of Indonesian, while in English speech, children display phonemes and intonation that correspond to English. Second, children develop lexical equivalents or bilingual synonyms, which shows that children are able to differentiate between the two lexical systems of the two languages. Third, MHK can produce speech with a syntactic structure that is unique to each language. For example, sentence structures in Indonesian are produced according to the rules of Indonesian grammar, and sentence structures in English follow the rules of English syntax.

According to Dardjowidjojo (2003), this phenomenon indicates that bilingual children have a natural ability to separate and manage two different language systems simultaneously. Other research by Gunawan (2018) also shows that bilingual children who are exposed to two languages are consistently able to develop grammar and vocabulary in both languages in parallel without any significant interference. This is relevant to the findings in MHK, where both languages develop in a balanced way and support their communicative skills in two languages.

Furthermore, research by Bialystok (2001) shows that bilingual children not only learn two languages, but also develop better cognitive skills, such as the ability to think critically and solve problems. In the context of MHK, this ability is seen in the ability to switch between two languages fluently, indicating cognitive flexibility. This is in line with the theory that exposure to two languages can enrich children's learning experiences and prepare them to face more complex challenges in the future.

Apart from that, social interactions that occur in MHK's bilingual environment also play an important role in language development. According to Vygotsky (1978), social interaction is a crucial factor in language learning and development. MHK frequently interacts with family members who speak both languages, which provides real context for the use of different languages. In this case, the use of language in diverse social

contexts helps MHKs understand the nuances and subtleties of each language, improving their pragmatic and social abilities.

These findings have important implications for understanding language acquisition in bilingual children, especially in the context of families with dual language use. Further research could investigate factors that influence this balance, such as the intensity of language exposure, the context of language use, and the role of the social environment. In addition, research could expand the focus on aspects of pragmatics, such as how bilingual children understand and use language in different social contexts.

Thus, this research provides a clear picture of how bilingual children like MHK are not only able to master two languages, but also develop better cognitive and social skills. This shows the importance of supporting a language-rich environment for children in this phase of their development. In the future, further studies are needed to explore how other factors, such as formal education and interactions with peers, may influence language development in bilingual children.

4. Conclusion

The development of MHK language syntax is exposed in Indonesian and English, transfer is found in the development of syntax. Both experienced balanced development.

This research shows that the syntactic development of Mayesa Hafsa Kirana (MHK), a bilingual child who studies Indonesian and English, takes place in a balanced manner. This child demonstrated the ability to produce utterances from single words to complex sentences in both languages, with relatively parallel milestones. The processes of acquiring a first language (L1) and a second language (L2) do not inhibit each other, but rather go hand in hand, which supports the theory that bilingual children can develop two separate language systems simultaneously.

The research results also indicate that there is transfer between languages which influences sentence usage patterns. In addition, social environmental factors and parental support play an important role in the language acquisition process, enriching children's learning experiences. These findings emphasize the importance of the bilingual context in children's language development, as well as the implications for the education and care of bilingual children in bilingual environments. Further research is needed to explore other factors that influence balance in language development in bilingual children.

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