

Syntax Unraveled : Exploring First Language Acquisition in Children's Linguistic Development

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ABSTRACT

This study explores syntactic development in first language acquisition in 54-month-old children, focusing on children's linguistic ability to use conjunctions and relative phrases. A multilingual environment may influence syntactic development in these children differently compared to monolingual children. Multilingual children have a wider exposure to various syntactic structures, which allows them more flexibility in understanding and using these structures. Exposure to three languages can enrich the child's vocabulary and improve his/her ability to process linguistic information, which in turn affects the use of more complex syntactic structures. The findings from this study demonstrate the proficiency of a girl exposed to Bengkulu, Serawai and Indonesian languages. The child demonstrated a strong understanding of syntactic structures by scoring an average of 4.34 morphemes per utterance, which places the child's stage of language acquisition at stage V according to her age. This proficiency is likely due to the positive influence of a multilingual environment on the child's language development. This study underscores the importance of early exposure to multiple languages in enhancing syntactic proficiency and highlights the benefits of such exposure on children's language acquisition.

Keywords: acquisition, mean length of utterances, syntactic

INTRODUCTION

Children's language development is complemented and enriched by the community environment in which they live. It shows the complexity of a child's language environment that influences language development in children. Child language acquisition often focuses on children who acquire

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only one language. However, this study highlights a child who was exposed to three languages and dialects in his first language acquisition. By being exposed to three languages from an early age, the child can understand and use all three languages. It shows a child's flexibility and adaptability in using language.

Language acquisition and its guiding principles have been at the forefront of psycholinguistic and developmental research for over five decades (Leivada & Murphy, 2022). Language acquisition is one of the significant developmental features in children, where they adopt various strategies to develop vocabulary and associated meanings (Jahan, 2022). Chomsky argues that a child is born with a language acquisition device (LAD) (Kadau, 2024). First Language acquisition is the subconscious process by which humans acquire the capacity to perceive and comprehend language (Kumar, 2021).

Chaer states that language acquisition is the processing that occurs in a child's brain when he acquires his first language or mother tongue (Nasuha, 2020). Language acquisition is conceptually related to theories which focuses on the similarity between a developing child's language input and use, leading to remarkable linguistic abilities (Behrens, 2021; Liu, 2024). Language acquisition is imperfect language acquisition; this is a result of the children's language learning resources still being basic (Setiawan, 2024 ; Hassan & Rami, 2024). Dardjowidjojo assumes that the process of children learning to master their mother tongue is acquisition, while the process of people (generally adults) learning in class is learning (Karimah et al., 2023).

This term is different from learning, a process carried out at a formal level (learning in class and taught by a teacher) (Syaprizal, 2019). The acquisition of language is the process whereby children achieve fluent control of their native language (Umaroh & Ellyawati, 2016). The term 'acquisition' is used rather than 'learning' because 'learning' tends to be employed by psychologists (Campbell & Wales, 2016). Psycholinguists have the task of explaining the similarities and differences in how people naturally acquire a first language (L1) and learn a second language (L2) (Perkins & Zhang, 2024).

Saville-Troike (2017) distinguishes between L1 and L2 to clarify the meaning of these two terms. L1 is also referred to as native language, primary language, and mother tongue, which is acquired during childhood, usually before age three. L1 is usually acquired in the process of growing up together with people who speak the same language. L2 refers to two things: the first is the study of individuals or groups who are learning a language (Mohamad

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Nor & Rashid, 2018; Kim et al., 2024). The environment is fundamental to the child's cognitive and social development process in language acquisition (Alotaibi, 2024).

During the language acquisition stage, the children acquire language skills spontaneously, a subset may exhibit speech delays (Amelia et al., 2023; Leng et al., 2024). Milestones of language acquisition such as crying, cooing, babbling, intonation patterns, one-word and two-word utterances, and questions (Alotaibi, 2024). In the two-word speech stage, children's language abilities in syntax and semantics are more clearly visible so that they are easy to understand, such as sentences in the form of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs (Zulfa & Setiawan, 2021; Cheung et al., 2024). Therefore, in the next stage of the process, the acquisition of syntax is essential for communication.

The growth of the child's speech can be identified by the increasing perfection of the utterances produced by the child. It dictates how words are combined to form meaningful and grammatically correct sentences (Kunah & Supriyani, 2024). Syntactic acquisition in children begins at less than two years or 24 months (Vyshedskiy et al., 2024). By this age, children can already construct sentences of two or more words (Yogatama, 2011; Yogatama, 2013). Syntax refers to the rules governing the structure of sentences in a language. Tarigan argues that the level of syntax acquisition in children is a series of unity that starts from the utterance of one word towards simple sentences with more complicated word combinations, namely syntax (Lestari et al., 2023).

The process of acquiring syntax starts with word combinations. When children's multi-word combinations include a verb, it is typically nonfinite (verb stem or infinitive) and positioned at the end of the utterance (Kauschke et al., 2024). Two-word utterances are words from the major categories such as actor-doing (FN-FV), actor-object (FN-FN), action-object (FV-FN), action-location (FV-FAdv) (Simanjuntak, 2018). Meanwhile, the development of language increases as a child grows older (Narayan & Goundar, 2024). Nababan divides into four stages in the first language acquisition process, such as the babbling stage, the one-word one-phrase, the two-word one-phrase, and the telegram-like stage (Marsis & Annisa, 2018 ; Amelia et al., 2023).

a) Prelingual Period (age 0-first)

The Prelingual phase was characterized by the baby's ability to babble as a way of communicating with his parents. At that time, the baby appears to

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be passively receiving external stimuli given by his parents, but the baby can give different responses by smiling.

b) Early Lingual Period (age 1-2½ years)

The early lingual phase is characterized by the child's ability to make one-word and two-word sentences in a conversation with others. The early lingual period is classified into three stages: 1) The one-word sentence period (holophrase) is the child's ability to compose sentences consisting of only one word, for example, "Mommy". 2) The two-word sentence period is a period of language development characterized by the child's ability to compose sentences consisting of two words, and the grammar of the sentence is still not perfect, such as: "brother fell". 3) The period of sentences of more than two words is a period of language development characterized by the ability of children to make sentences entirely in accordance with the S-P arrangement.

c) Period of Differentiation (age 2½ -5 years)

This phase is marked by the child's ability to master language according to correct and perfect grammar rules.

Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) is highly correlated with a child's chronological age. As a result, mean length of utterance value should indicate a specific stage in the child's language development and thus estimate the child's actual age (Wieczorek, 2010; Brookes et al., 2024). Mean length of utterance is a measure of language development reflecting syntactical complexity and has a positive correlation with age. Studies suggest that mean length of utterance is sensitive to the age of typically developing children when mean length of utterance in morphemes is under 2.5–3.0.

Brown established five stages of language development, which provide morphological and syntactic frameworks that aid Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) in analyzing samples of children's speech productions (Al Hunedy et al., 2024). Brown proposed that after developmental stage V (age 3–4 years), mean length of utterance loses its sensitivity as a grammatical ability indicator (Wu, 2020). Mean length of utterance allows for the identification of children "at the same level of constructional complexity" despite potential differences in chronological age (Ezeizabarrena & Garcia Fernandez, 2018).

Mean length of utterance has become a commonly used method of evaluating linguistic ability (Shillingsburg et al., 2020). Brown initially proposed mean length of utterance to capture early language development in his longitudinal study of three children (Potratz et al., 2022). Mean length of

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utterance is determined by counting either words (MLU-w) or morphemes (MLU-m) in a sample of approximately 100 recorded spontaneous utterances per child and dividing the total words or morphemes by the number of utterances (Putri & Harahap, 2021).

For example, an utterance such as ‘I kicked the ball’ can be counted as either four words or five morphemes, whereas ‘kicked’ consists of two morphemes (Brookes et al., 2024). While it is time-consuming to collect, transcribe and calculate mean length of utterance, it serves as a reliable index that effectively measures language development in children, especially those with language disorders (Al Huneety et al., 2024).

Through a qualitative descriptive approach, the study adopts Roger Brown's Mean Length of Utterance theory as a guiding light. Brown proposed a comprehensive method of calculating the length of utterance called the Mean Length of Utterance (MLU). Mean length of utterance is computed by dividing the total number of morphemes in an utterance by the total number of utterances (Gouda et al., 2020). Mean length of utterance, as ‘an excellent simple index of grammatical development’, divided the grammatical development of children based on mean length of utterance into five stages:

Table 1 :

The Stages of Language Acquisition (Mean Length of Utterance)

Stages	Mean Length of Utterance	Description
I Stage	1.0-2.0 morphemes or 1.75 morphemes	(12-26 months of age) Semantic roles and syntactic relations. Here child puts noun-verb sequences together.
II Stage	2.0-2.5 morphemes or 2.25 morphemes	(27-30 months of age) Grammatical morphemes and modulation meaning. The child starts to change word endings to portray grammar.
III Stage	2.5-3.25 morphemes or 2.75 morphemes	(31-36 months of age) Modalities of simple sentences. The child begins to use questions and imperatives.
IV Stage	3.25-3.75 morphemes or 3.5 morphemes	(36-40 months of age) Embedding allows the child to begin using complex sentences, which significantly improves the child's language skills.
V Stage	3.75-4.25 morphemes or 4 morphemes	(41-45 months of age) Coordination: The child may use connectors and more functions. At this stage, the child can coordinate language skills by using conjunctions and more functions.

The average amount of words or morphemes that a person produces in each utterance is called the mean length of utterance. Mean length of

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utterance provides valuable information about language development, and it is an essential indicator of language disorder or delay. Generally, a typical child's chronological age (up to age 5) will correspond closely to his or her mean length of utterance (Gouda et al., 2020). For example, a typically developing four-year-old or 3-month-old child will often exhibit an mean length of utterance of approximately 4.3 plus or minus a few tenths.

Miller and Chapman argue that mean length of utterance is one of the language measurements that can be obtained through spontaneous discourse. Its main goal is to obtain data about morphological and syntactical aspects of language in children with both typical development and language disorders (Gouda et al., 2020). This research aims to investigate the relationship between the average length of children's utterances and the development of syntax in first language acquisition in under 5-year-old.

The study seeks to analyze how the average length of utterances correlates with syntactic complexity and proficiency in children's speech, providing insights into their language development process. This research identifies several gaps. Firstly, there is a gap in understanding child language acquisition, as the study focuses on mean length of utterance without exploring factors influencing variations in children's syntactic abilities.

Secondly, there is a gap in linking mean length of utterance findings with broader linguistic theories. Thirdly, there is a gap in practical implications, requiring further research to identify effective intervention strategies based on understanding child syntax. Addressing these gaps will significantly contribute to our knowledge of child language acquisition, especially in educational contexts.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research design with a descriptive method to examine the language development of 54-month-old children. The primary purpose of this study is to describe the average length of children's speech and analyze the development of syntax in children's speech based on Brown's theory of average length (Shahouzaei et al., 2023). The data source was obtained from a 54-month-old girl, Azkadina Nafisha Putri, the first child of Mr. Anton Novriansyah. Three languages are exposed or obtained based on the environment around the child: Bengkulu, Serawai, and Indonesian. Based on data collection conducted on January 7, 9, 11, and 14, 2024.

The data obtained amounted to 214 utterances with 929 morphemes per utterance, which was done by recording the child's voice and recording

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the child's speech while listening, recording, and recording all the utterances spoken by the child during the process of collecting data via telephone. Before the data collection process began, the researcher and the informant had interacted daily for three years, from when the informant was one year old to 4 years old. During this period, the researcher observed the child's language process and development. Data collection was done over the phone due to the limited distance between the researcher and the child.

The criteria for selecting the child participants were as follows: the child was 3-5 years old, male or female (this study selected girls); the child was generally well developed and had a very unremarkable developmental and medical history as reported in their child's case history file and came from a multilingual family. The data collection technique uses three techniques, namely 1) the Simak Libat Cakap (SLC) technique, the researcher is directly involved in the conversation process with the research subject through Video Call; 2) the Tapping technique, the researcher taps when the speaker takes place to capture the data, and 3) Note-taking technique, the researcher records the data obtained after doing the two previous techniques.

Brown used MLUm as the basis for his analysis of language development in children (Hickey, 1991; Tallas-Mahajna & Dromi, 2024). Mean length of utterance is measured by dividing the total number of morphemes in an utterance by the total number of utterances. Based on the importance of this, Brown argues that how calculating mean length of utterance can be done in several steps, first taking a sample of 100 utterances. Second, count the number of morphemes. Third, divide the number of morphemes by the number of utterances, as in the following formula.

$$MLU = \frac{\Sigma \text{ number of morphemes}}{\Sigma \text{ number of utterances}}$$

The instrument in this research is the researcher himself. Therefore, Moleong argues that researchers have an essential role in determining the focus of research, planning and carrying out something that will be done, collecting the data needed, then analyzing the data, interpreting the data, revising the data, providing research reports, and providing conclusions (Pahleviannur et al., 2022). In the data collection process, the researcher attempted to obtain the required data by using tools in the form of a cellphone as a sound and video recording device.

The process of analyzing data, this research uses data analysis techniques carried out in several steps, which are: 1) Transcribing data, describing utterances spoken by research subjects, 2) Selecting data,

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processing data adjusted to the focus of the research conducted, namely by calculating mean length of utterance and syntax, and 3) classifying data, grouping utterances based on the number of words in the utterance into a data table, 4) analyzing data by calculating using mean length of utterance formula, then classifying based on Brown's theory, and researchers also analyzed syntactic ability in the utterance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved a 54-month-old girl. The child's first language is Bengkulu. The languages spoken by her parents are Bengkulu and Serawai (Kedurang). Her mother's language is Serawai, and she uses the dialectal accent of Kedurang language. At the same time, her father uses the language and dialectal accent of Bengkulu. What is unique about this informant is that She has been exposed to three different dialects and languages, namely Serawai and Bengkulu (two variations of cognate dialects) and Indonesian.

In addition, in the context of the play environment and the surrounding environment, the child frequently communicates using Indonesian with the people closest to him, such as his playmates (peers) and family. As a result, by getting used to listening to three languages since childhood, the acquisition domain of language absorbs all three varieties of language, meaning that the child understands and understands all three languages. Furthermore, in the process of speaking, the child often uses two languages, Indonesian or Bengkulu language only, or even both languages simultaneously.

During the data collection process, the researcher saw that the child had extraordinary communication skills but could have been better in language structure or grammar, which still had many inaccuracies. In the sentence "pasien banyak", the sentence focuses on the patient as the main object. Whereas it should be "banyak pasien" atau "There are many patients", which is a sentence that focuses on the number of patients as the main subject. In this case, the intended speech has a sentence context, and the emphasis to be conveyed on the number of patients, "many patients" may be more appropriate.

Furthermore, in the sentence "ayuk tengok ado tengok geprek chicken, ayuk tengok ado klengkeng, ayuk tengok again popcorn" or "I saw Geprek chicken, I saw Klengkeng, I saw Popcorn", it can be seen that there is no conjunction. However, in other sentences, this child uses conjunctions in his sentences, such as in the sentence "Adek Noe pas ayuk tarok tangan ayuk di situ, *terus* tejepit ayuk kecek auww" or "Adek Noe, when I put my hand in

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there, it got pinched, **and** I said it hurt”. This child uses the word “terus” atau "and" to connect two events.

a. Calculation Results (Mean Length of Utterance)

The researcher found that children can compose grammatical structures in a sentence of 9 to 16 morphemes. According to the research objectives, the data collected were the utterances that were eligible to be calculated using mean length of utterance formula in Brown's theory.

The procedure for classifying the data is by grouping the children's utterances based on the number of morphemes. Furthermore, the number of morphemes obtained was 929 divided by the number of utterances in the data, as many as 214 utterances. The following is a table of morpheme acquisition in children and a discussion of the calculation of the average length of utterances in children using Brown's theory.

Tabel 2 :
Calculation Results (Mean Length of Utterance)

Utterances	Σ^u	Σ^m
2-word utterance	42	84
3-word utterance	42	126
4-word utterance	36	144
5-word utterance	25	125
6-word utterance	16	96
7-word utterance	19	133
8-word utterance	6	48
9-word utterance	7	63
10-16 word utterance	8	99

$$MLU = \Sigma \frac{\text{Jumlah Morfem}}{\text{Jumlah Ujaran}}$$

$$MLU = \Sigma \frac{929}{214} = 4,34$$

Based on the results of calculations using mean length of utterance formula, the average length of speech is 4.34 morphemes per/utterance. Referring to mean length of utterance theory echoed by Brown’s (1973), the results of the child’s calculations are at the level of language ability appropriate for his current age. Stage V is the step where children can acquire 3.75 to 4.25 morphemes per/utterance with an age range of 41 - 45 months. The child can coordinate and use conjunctions and more functions.

In other words, this indicates that this child is at the proper stage at the age of 54-months, with the average number of morphemes passing the minimum limit of 4,34 morphemes per/utterance. The results of the analysis, the child does not have a delay in child language development because this child has reached the stage of development at his age. The analysis of the

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speech also shows the child's language acquisition in the form of several types of words, namely nouns (N), verbs (V), adjectives (Adj), adverbs (Adv), and numerals (Num).

b. Analysis of Syntactic Acquisition

Researchers classify speech based on the stages of the Differentiation Period (age 2½ -5 years), characterized by the child's ability to master language following perfect grammatical rules, namely sentences consisting of subject, predicate, and object. The vocabulary has also developed, both in terms of quality and quantity. Then, analyze the data that has been grouped based on the context of syntactic studies. In the process of analyzing, a tendency was found in the child, namely stating something, ordering, and telling or informing others or interlocutors of what was seen and felt based on the data obtained. The following is a table of discussion on 2-word speech.

Table 3 :
Syntactic Acquisition of 2-Word Utterances

No. Data	Bengkulu Language	Translation	Description
B.36	Ayah kerja	Dad is working	Subject (S): "Ayah" acts as the subject, which is the person who performs the action or activity. Predicate (P): "Work" acts as the predicate, which is the action or activity performed by the subject.
D.6	Pasien banyak (banyak pasien)	Many patients	"Banyak Pasien" is a sentence that focuses on the number of patients as the main subject. Meanwhile, "Pasien Banyak" is a sentence that focuses on the patient as the main object. In this case, the intended speech has a sentence context, and the emphasis to be conveyed on the number of patients, "Banyak Pasien" may be more appropriate

Based on the results obtained in Table 4, the child can combine two words to form a sentence. It indicates the ability to use basic syntactic structures. In the sentence "Dad is working" or "Ayah kerja," the word 'Ayah' acts as the subject and 'Kerja' as the predicate. The child has understood the basics of sentence structure by having a subject and a predicate. In the use of nouns and verbs, the child can use a combination of nouns ('Ayah' and 'pasien') and verbs ('Kerja' dan 'banyak'). It indicates a basic understanding of the role of words in sentences.

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Although the sentences are short, the child can convey information about the father being at work and having many patients. It reflects the ability to organize words in a way that can transmit meaning. The child has developed the ability to convey their experiences or observations through these simple sentences. Although the sentences may not have reached a higher level of syntactic complexity, the above syntactic analysis shows that the child has reached an early stage in the development of his syntactic abilities. The child's language acquisition at this stage is an essential step toward developing more complex syntactic skills in the future.

Table 4 :
Syntactic Acquisition of 3-Word Utterances

No. Data	Bengkulu Language	Translation	Description
D.5	Ado orang sakit	There are sick people	Predicate (P): “ada”, Subject (S): “orang”, Object (O): “sakit”. In this sentence, “ada” acts as a verb that shows existence or existence; the word “person” acts as the subject, which is the person who exists. Meanwhile, the word “sakit” acts as an object or description, providing information about the circumstances of the subject.

The child can understand the basic structure of a sentence by combining two elements, such as a subject and a predicate, in the sentence ‘There are sick people’ or ‘Ada orang sakit’. Used of Adjectives ‘ada’. The child uses ‘ada’ to express the presence or situation. The child understands situations or activities, such as the presence of sick people, such as ‘ada orang sakit’.

Although the sentences are simple, the child has included object ‘orang’ elements. The child chooses relevant vocabulary to convey the message, showing the ability to identify words appropriate to the situation expressed. The child can arrange two words to form a sentence with meaning, showing a basic understanding of sentence structure.

Table 5 :
Syntactic Acquisition of 4-Word Utterances

No. Data	Bengkulu Language	Translation	Description
D.49	Tengok sepatu ayuk aunty	Look at my shoe, aunty	There is no perfect sentence structure in this sentence. The child turns the subject into an adverb, which should make the sentence

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more correct: Look at my shoe, aunty. In this word, 'tengok' or 'lihat' is a **predicate** expressing the action of seeing. Meanwhile, the sentence "sepatu ayuk, aunty" acts as an object, which is the object or thing that is the subject of observation.

The child uses nominal phrases well in the sentence, for example, 'sepatu ayuk, Aunty', to refer to a specific object. The child combines the verbs look or 'lihat' with the corresponding objects 'Look at my shoe, aunty'. The child understands the difference between the noun 'Sepatu' and the verb 'Lihat'. The child understands the correct order of words in sentences, as in 'Lihat' sepatu mbak aunty'.

Although the sentences are simple, the child has not yet used connecting words (such as 'and' or 'or') to link two ideas or objects. However, this may correspond to the child's level of language development at a particular stage. The child chooses words that fit the context of the sentence, showing a growing understanding of how to use words in specific contexts. With these sentences, the child understands syntax, including using nominal phrases, verbs, objects, and words in the correct sequence.

Table 6 :
Syntactic Acquisition of 5-Word Utterances

No. Data	Bengkulu Language	Translation	Description
D.43	Ayuk adin ndak mandi dulu	I want to take a shower first	Subject (S): 'Ayuk Adin', Predicate (V): 'mau mandi' (a verb that shows the desire or intention to take a shower), and Description of Time (K): 'dulu' (a description of the time that shows the order of time, indicating that bathing will be done before other activities)

The child uses prenominal (pronominal and verbs) 'Ayuk Adin' correctly to refer to himself. The verbs 'mau mandi' are also used correctly, showing an understanding of the use of verbs in sentences. The child understands sentence structure by arranging words correctly, as in 'I want to take a shower first'. Although sentences are simple, children are not yet using connecting words or conjunctions (such as 'and' or 'because') to link ideas or information. It can be following the child's level of language development at that stage.

The child understands time order using 'dulu' in the sentence 'Ayuk Adin mau mandi dulu'. The child chooses words that fit the context of the sentence, showing a growing understanding of how to use words in specific

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situations. The child uses phrases such as ‘mau mandi dulu’ well, demonstrating the ability to construct phrases that have meaning. The child progresses in syntactic understanding by constructing grammatically and contextually adequate sentences. Although still simple, the sentences reflect the proper use of language elements in sentences.

Table 7 :

Syntactic Acquisition of 6-Word Utterances

No. Data	Bengkulu Language	Translation	Description
A.31	Ayuk lagi beli makan diwarung	I'm buying some food at the grocery store	Subject (S): “Aku”. Predicate (V): “sedang beli” (expresses the action of buying). Object (O): “makan” (the object or item being purchased is food). Description of Place (K): “di warung” (a description of the place that shows the location of the activity, which is in a stall)

The child uses prenominal (subject and pronominal) ‘Ayuk’ to refer to self. The child uses the verb ‘sedang beli’ correctly, showing an understanding of using verbs in sentences. The objects in the sentence “makan” are also used correctly. The child demonstrated an understanding of sentence structure by arranging words correctly and adequately.

The child chooses words that fit the context of the sentence, showing a good sense of how to use words in specific situations. The child understands location in the sentence by including the word “di warung” to describe where food is purchased. The child understands time by using the word “sedang” in the sentence, indicating that buying food is ongoing.

Table 8 :

Syntactic Acquisition of 7-Word Utterances

No. Data	Bengkulu Language	Translation	Description
C.47	Ayuk adin besok ndk kerumah sakit	Tomorrow, I want to go to the hospital	Subject (S): “Ayuk Adin” (the person acting). Object (O): There is no direct object in this sentence. Description (K): “Besok” is an adverb of time indicating when the action will be performed, in this case, on the day following today, and “ke rumah sakit” (An adverb of place indicating the location where the action is to be performed).

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The child uses words and phenomena such as ‘Ayuk Adin’, ‘besok’, and ‘mau’ appropriately in the context of the first sentence. The objects in these sentences (‘ke rumah sakit’) are used correctly. The child understands sentence structure by arranging the words correctly and adequately. The child chooses words that fit the context of the sentence, showing a good understanding of how to use words in specific situations.

The child understood time by using the word ‘tomorrow’ in the sentence, indicating that Mbak Adin’s activities would be carried out the following day. In conclusion, the child shows good ability in syntactic understanding by constructing sentences that are grammatical and appropriate to the context. The sentences reflect the effective use of various language elements in simple sentences.

Table 9 :
Syntactic Acquisition of 8-Word Utterances

No. Data	Bengkulu Language	Translation	Description
D.48	Ayuk punya sepatu loh, tengok ! banyak sepatu ayuk	I have shoes, look! I have a lot of shoes!	Subject (S): “Ayuk” (the person who owns the shoes). Predicate (P): “punya” and “lihat” (the action or state associated with the subject). Object (O): “sepatu” (the object of the actions “punya” and “lihat”, i.e. the item that is owned or seen). Description (K): “loh” and “banyak” (captions that provide additional information or emphasize an aspect).

The child uses words and pronomina appropriately in the context of the sentence. The child uses the verbs ‘punya’ and ‘lihat’ correctly in the sentence. The objects in these sentences (‘sepatu mbak’) are used correctly. The child understood sentence structure by arranging the words correctly and adequately. The child chooses words appropriate to the context of the sentence, showing a good sense of how to use words in specific situations.

In the sentence, the child uses the word ‘loh’ to provide additional information or emphasize the ownership of the shoes. The child used the word ‘banyak’ to express the number of shoes that belonged to Mbak. In conclusion, the child shows good ability in syntactic understanding by constructing sentences that are grammatical and appropriate to the context. The sentences reflect the precise use of various language elements in simple sentences.

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Table 10 :
Syntactic Acquisition of 9-Word Utterances

No. Data	Bengkulu Language	Translation	Description
C.64	Kalau idak sekolah, idak boleh main ke TK tutup	If you don't go to school, you can't play at the closed Kindergarten.	Subject (S): No subject is explicitly mentioned in this sentence. Predicate (P): 'boleh main' and 'tutup' (the action or state associated with the subject). Object (O): "ke Taman Kanak-Kanak" (the object of the action "boleh main", i.e. the place that may be visited). Description (K): "kalau tidak sekolah" and "tidak" (Remarks that provide additional information about conditions or restrictions).

The child uses the words appropriately in the context of the sentence. The child uses sentence constructions appropriate for everyday language, but there is a little clutter in the sentence. The child demonstrated an understanding of sentence structure by arranging the words correctly and adequately. The child chooses words that fit the context of the sentence, showing a good understanding of how to use words in specific situations.

In the sentence, the child uses the conditional construction correctly, showing an understanding of the relationship between school and permission to go to kindergarten. In conclusion, despite some confusion in the sentence, the child shows good ability in syntactic understanding by constructing sentences that are grammatical and appropriate to the context. The sentences reflect a reasonably good use of various language elements in simple sentences.

Table 11 :
Syntactic Acquisition of 15-16 Word Utterances

No. Data	Bengkulu Language	Translation	Description
D.50	Ini nih sepatu yang beli kek oom kemarin, yang kito keliling-keliling kek oom.	These are the shoes that uncle bought yesterday, which we looked for together.	Subject (S): No subject is explicitly mentioned in this sentence. Predicate (P): "membelikan" and "berkeliling" (the action or state associated with the subject). Object (O): "sepatu" (the object of the action "belikan", i.e. the item purchased). Description (K): "kemarin"

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			and "yang dikunjungi bersama oom" (captions that provide additional information about the time of purchase and the activities afterward).
D.36	Adek Noe pas ayuk tarok tangan ayuk di situ, terus tejepit ayuk kecek auww	My little brother when I put my hand in there, then it got pinched I said it hurts	Subject (S): "mbak" (the person performing or experiencing the action). Predicate (P): "meletakkan" and "terjepit" (action or state associated with the subject). Object (O): "tangan" (the object of the action "leaking", i.e. the body part that is placed). Description (K): "terus terjepit mba ngomong sakit" (a phrase or description that provides additional information about the time and conditions surrounding the action). Conjunction: "terus" (connects two events).

The child used the conjunction 'yang' to link clauses in the first sentence, employing a relative phrase to explain 'The shoes that my uncle bought me yesterday'. Demonstrating a solid grasp of syntax, the child crafted a sentence with two interconnected clauses and presented a sequential account of events in the second sentence. Lexical choices showcased a nuanced understanding of contextual word usage.

The second sentence conveyed a temporal sequence using time or 'waktu' and next or 'terus', offering insights into the interaction between 'Adek and 'mbak' within a specific locale ('disitu' or 'there'). In summary, the child demonstrates commendable syntactic proficiency, constructing grammatically sound sentences with relative phrases and intricate structures in the first sentence and detailing temporal sequences in the second.

In the research 'Syntax Unraveled: Exploring First Language Acquisition in Children's Linguistic Development', the discussion section provides a platform to explore the significance of the research findings to a deeper understanding of the process of first language acquisition in children. The discussion not only outlines the significance of the research issues within the framework of the existing literature but also identifies theoretical implications that might expand our understanding of the development of syntactic abilities in children.

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Based on the concept of mean length of utterance, which is a method to measure the linguistic products produced by a child and is an indicator of determining the status of language development (Klatte et al., 2022). The results of calculating mean length of utterance in the child using Brown's theory. In the data analysis, the researcher calculated MLU as a measure of language complexity, which revealed a mean length of utterance score of 4.34 morphemes per utterance. The higher the child's mean length of utterance, the higher the child's language acquisition (Rahmaningtyas & Pratomo, 2023). Thus, the higher the number of morphemes, the higher the mean length of utterance score (Pavelko & Owens Jr., 2023).

Empirically, if mean length of utterance of children increases, its syntactic form will be more complex (Potratz et al., 2022). In other words, the child can create a complex sentence structure using complete sentence elements, including subject, predicate, object, and adverb. The child's syntactic ability in a multilingual environment and its impact on language acquisition. A 54-month-old child's multilingual environment may influence his/her syntactic development in unique ways compared to his/her monolingual peers.

Multilingual children often have a more comprehensive range of expertise in syntactic structures because they are familiar with multiple languages early on (Pinto et al., 2017). From an acquisition point of view, some studies show that monolingual children can reproduce the complete plot of a story based on syntactic structures by the age of five (Carbonara et al., 2024).

Multilingualism does not cause linguistic disorders in children. However, the linguistic experiences of children with multilingual backgrounds will differ from those of monolingual children (Stanford et al., 2024). This leads to a situation where children with multilingual backgrounds generally have less linguistic achievement than their monolingual peers, particularly in vocabulary and syntax (Scharff Rethfeldt, 2019).

However, in the case of this study, the child with multilingualism acquired from his/her environment did not experience language impairment or a lack of vocabulary and syntax achievement. The child can draw on their rich vocabulary and broader language understanding and transfer syntactic rules between the languages they master. Although they may face challenges in separating the use of syntactic structures in each language, this diverse exposure can help them build more flexible and complex syntactic abilities.

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CONCLUSION

The study on syntactic development in multilingual children, particularly focusing on a proficient 52-month-old child, revealed significant findings. Exposure to multiple languages enriched children's syntactic abilities, leading to more flexible and complex structures. Multilingual children demonstrated a broader range of expertise in syntactic structures due to early exposure to multiple languages. Despite potential challenges separating syntactic structures in each language, multilingual children could leverage their rich vocabulary and broader language understanding to transfer syntactic rules between languages. The proficient 54-month-old child in the study exhibited a Mean Length of Utterances (MLU) score of 4.34 morphemes per utterance, indicating a strong understanding of syntactic structures. These findings underscore the positive influence of a multilingual environment on children's language development, particularly in enhancing syntactic proficiency. Recommendations for future research include investigating specific syntactic structures that multilingual children excel in, exploring the impact of multilingualism on the development of more complex syntactic abilities, conducting longitudinal studies, and comparing case studies of children from diverse multilingual backgrounds. In practical terms, educators can leverage the benefits of multilingualism by incorporating activities that promote syntactic development in multiple languages. At the same time, speech-language pathologists can tailor intervention strategies to support multilingual children in navigating syntactic challenges across languages. Providing opportunities for multilingual children to practice and transfer syntactic rules between languages can enhance their language skills and proficiency. By addressing these recommendations and implications, future research can contribute to a deeper understanding of syntactic development in multilingual contexts and provide valuable insights for educators and speech-language pathologists working with multilingual children.

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