Second Language Acquisition Syntax Aspect as the Basis for the Development of Teaching Materials in Elementary School Students

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ABSTRACT

At the elementary school level, particularly in second grade, second-language learners' syntactic abilities still face various challenges. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the syntactic aspects of language acquisition in second-grade learners as a basis for developing teaching materials. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach. This study was conducted in elementary schools in Yogyakarta City. Data collection techniques used in the needs analysis were interviews, questionnaires, listening, and note-taking. The data analysis technique used in this study was Miles Huberman's interactive technique. The results of this study are that the acquisition of syntactic aspects in a second language occurs gradually, from simple sentences to complex sentences. The syntactic aspects of a second language that students master are the acquisition of sentences based on the number of clauses: simple sentences and compound sentences; the acquisition of sentences based on content: declarative sentences, interrogative sentences, imperative sentences, and exclamatory sentences; the acquisition of sentences based on predicates: verbal sentences have not been varied. The implication of the results of this study is that it is necessary to develop Indonesian language teaching materials in grade II of elementary school that are oriented towards the stages of students' syntactic acquisition, starting from simple sentences to complex sentences.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, Syntax, Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in children's cognitive and social development, particularly in the context of second language learning. At the elementary school level, particularly in second grade, children's second language learning syntactic abilities still face various challenges. One of the main issues is the lack of teaching materials appropriate to children's language development stages and learning methods that effectively support the understanding of language structure.

To improve language skills, students should not only focus on instructions or assignments from teachers, but students need to develop themselves (self-development) because they know more about their interests, talents, abilities and quality of life. (Hasanudin dkk., 2020). To produce quality students in terms of language—especially second language—is certainly not easy, because good achievement certainly requires maximum effort, which is very dependent on the individual as a student who carries out the learning process. (Muliadi & Rosyidi, 2021).

In the process of acquiring a second language (L2), children face various challenges stemming from the structural differences between their first language (L1) and second language, as well as environmental and cognitive factors that influence the process. Some of the problems that can be analyzed are: 1) First Language Interference on Second Language Syntax. Students tend to apply the syntactic structure of their first language to their second language, which causes errors in sentence structure.

The subject-predicate-object structure in B1 is not always the same as in B2, but students still use the B1 pattern. 2) Differences in Social and Linguistic Backgrounds. Students come from different mother tongue backgrounds (e.g., regional languages), so their initial level of proficiency in the second language also varies. This causes differences in the speed and quality of syntactic acquisition. 3) Lack of Syntax Learning Strategies in the Curriculum. Second language learning in elementary schools tends to focus on vocabulary and basic understanding, while syntactic aspects are often not taught explicitly. As a result, many students do not understand complex sentence structures in the second language.

Based on these facts, if this problem is not resolved immediately, it will impact the foundation of Early Second Language Acquisition. Good syntax acquisition is the foundation for students' abilities to speak, write, read, and understand a second language comprehensively. If not mastered early on, it will affect students' language competence at subsequent levels of education. The accuracy of using sentence structures in a second language is directly related to students' literacy skills: reading comprehension, writing essays, and expressing opinions academically. If syntax mastery is not addressed from elementary school, a language gap will occur that impacts overall academic achievement.

In general, this issue has been discussed and studied, but not many studies have specifically examined it in relation to syntax in elementary schools. The research that has been conducted is "Syntax Acquisition in Early Childhood." (Rahmawati et al., 2024) examined second language acquisition in 5-year-old children, focusing on morphological and syntactic levels. The results showed that children were able to use words with affixes and form sentences, although errors in pronunciation and affix use still occurred. Agustina dan Wulandari (2020) studied the acquisition of syntax in 2-year-old children. They found that imperative sentences were more dominant than declarative and interrogative sentences, indicating that at this age, children use sentences more to request or give orders.

The Influence of First Language on Second Language Acquisition (Harsia, 2018) in his thesis revealed that the syntactic structure of the first language influences the use of Indonesian as a second language in fifth grade elementary school students. The use of sentence structures from the first language can influence students' Indonesian language analysis skills.

Factors Influencing Second Language Acquisition (Hadi et al., 2020) studied second language acquisition in third-grade students at SDN 011 Sebulu. They found that factors such as motivation, age, formal presentation, first language, and environment influenced students' second language acquisition. The Use of Technology in Syntax Learning (Zeinalipour et al., 2025) developed a specialized dataset called Essay-Syntax-Instruct to improve students' understanding and application of English syntax. By leveraging large language models (LLMs) such as GPT-3.5 Turbo, this study demonstrates that automated feedback can help students identify and correct their syntactic errors. Acquisition of Complex Syntax Structures (Yang et al., 2024) examined the production of recursive relative clauses in Mandarin Chinese in children aged 3 to 11. They found that children gradually master complex syntactic structures, with significant progress occurring with age.

Although there are several studies discussing syntax acquisition in early childhood, studies specifically examining the syntactic aspect of second language acquisition in elementary school students are still limited. This research is important to fill this gap, considering the influence of the first language, environmental factors, and the potential use of technology in syntax learning.

The theory used in this research is the Second Language Acquisition theory (Krashen, 1982; Ellis, 1997), Syntactic Aspects in Second Language Acquisition (White, 2003; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982). Syntax Acquisition in Elementary School Students (Vygotsky, 1978; Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Based on these problems, this study aims to analyze the syntactic aspects of language acquisition in second-grade elementary school children. This study offers an original contribution to the development of applied linguistics and language education by: providing new empirical data at the elementary school level, linking linguistic results to teaching practices, and addressing contextual needs in a multilingual country like Indonesia.

METHOD

The type of research used is descriptive qualitative research. The objectives of the research in the needs analysis and planning stage are to determine the practice of second language learning in elementary schools, as well as to

examine the teaching materials used in schools so far. The scope of the study includes the components of second language acquisition learning and factors that influence the success of second language learning. In addition, the research at this stage also aims to conduct a needs analysis of teachers and students for second language teaching materials to support language learning mastery in elementary schools. The activities carried out include literature studies (documents), observations of the learning process, and interviews. This research was conducted at elementary schools in Yogyakarta City. Subjects were selected using a convenience method. This method was chosen for ease of access, as these schools are partners of UNY (Sanusi, 2014).

The data collection techniques used in the needs analysis were interviews, questionnaires, observation, and note-taking, which were used to obtain information regarding second language learning issues and the need for second language teaching materials in elementary schools. The instruments used were interview guidelines and a questionnaire regarding the need for second language teaching materials. The language acquisition observation instruments are as follows.

Tabel 1. Instrumen Observasi Pemerolehan Bahasa

No.	Student Name	Single Sentence	Compound Sentences	Declarative	Interogative	Imperative	Verbal	Nominal
1	Student 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Student 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	Student 3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4	Student 4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5	And so on	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note:
1. Columns are filled in based on the number of sentences used by each student.
2. Observations can be made through conversation transcripts, written work, or direct classroom observation.
3. Other sentence types, such as exclamations, adjectives, and numerals, can be added as needed.

In addition to using interview guidelines, this study also used a questionnaire to explore the needs of the field regarding the desired second language learning model. The data analysis technique used was an interactive technique Miles Huberman et al, (Miles dkk., 2014) which applies four steps, namely: 1) data collection; 2) data reduction; 3) data presentation; and 4) drawing conclusions. After collecting data through interviews and needs analysis, researchers then perform data reduction. All data is classified into several categories and then data that is not considered important is discarded. Next, the reduced data is analyzed to obtain information or answers that will be used as material for drawing conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Second language acquisition is a crucial aspect for every elementary school teacher to understand. This is based on the fact that any interventions teachers undertake to improve students' language skills should be based on the child's language development. Syntactic second language acquisition is the process of mastering sentence structure, grammar, and grammatical rules.

Table 3. Students' Syntax Acquisition

No.	Sentence	Type	Amount
1	Variance based on number of clauses	Single Sentence	42
		Compound Sentences	18
2	Content-based variants	Declarative Sentences	35
		Interrogative Sentences	10
		Imperative Sentences	7
		Exciting Sentences	3
		Question Sentence	10
3	Variants based on predicate	Verbal sentence	28
		Nominal Sentences	15
		Adjective Sentences	8
		Numeracy Sentences	5
		Prepositional Sentences	4

The data I created in the previous simulation table is not per student, but rather the total accumulation of all second-grade students, estimated generally based on the frequency of sentence types in elementary school children's speech, both orally and in writing. Single sentences are more dominant (70%) because the cognitive structure of elementary school children is still developing. Compound sentences begin to appear in simple forms (e.g., "I like apples because they are sweet"). Declarative sentences (statements) dominate, in accordance with children's basic function in conveying information. Interrogative and imperative sentences begin to develop, especially in the social context of playing, asking teachers/friends, and giving orders. In the predicate category, verbal and nominal sentences are common forms. Adjective, numeral, and prepositional sentences are still limited to certain contexts.

Sentence Acquisition Based on the Number of Clauses

The students' Indonesian language skills are good, meaning they can master single sentences and compound sentences. However, when acquiring a second language—English—they are only just mastering single sentences.

I go to school 'saya pergi ke sekolah'		
I S	go V	to school O (preposisional phrase)

The mastery of Indonesian syntax—sentences based on the number of clauses—of students in Yogyakarta City appears to be good. This is evident from several sentence categories—Single sentences and compound sentences (compound sentences, compound sentences, and complex sentences) where students are able to master Single sentences and compound sentences. This justification is in accordance with the learning achievements and language development of children. The different thing is in the mastery of a second language—English—students have only just mastered Single sentences. The intended criteria are based on the fact that each student has different treatment in the initial stages of language acquisition.

The data above shows that students are able to write and pronounce single sentences clearly, accurately, and in accordance with the meaning and purpose of the utterance. This can be seen from the grammatical structure and semantic aspects of the language they acquire. The data shows that the majority of students speak a regional language (L1), and their L1 can influence how they learn a second language (L2). In many regional languages (and also Indonesian), word order can be different, or prepositions like "to" may be missing.

In learning, it appears that errors often occur. An example of a common error: "I go to school" (omitting "to") → this is because in Indonesian/regional phrases, it can be sufficient to say "I go to school". From the interlanguage side, when learning L2 students form their own language system called interlanguage, which is a mixture of L1 and L2. Sentences such as "I go to school" may initially be "I going school" or "I go to the school" (overgeneralization). When viewed from the stages of acquisition based on the processability theory, students may go through the stages "Go school" > "I go school" > "I go to school". Therefore, teachers must guide regarding how to utilize direct translation from L1 to L2 because sometimes the direct translation system is not structurally appropriate.

Sentence Acquisition Based on Content

Sentences acquired in a second language can be categorized into several types based on content: declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory. Based on the process, it can be seen that students are only able to master declarative and interrogative sentences in their second language, English. Meanwhile, in their second language, Indonesian, students are already able to master declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences.

Declarative sentence

I love my cat 'saya cinta kucing saya'		
I S	love V	my cat O

A declarative sentence has a simple structure of S + P + O. For English learners in Indonesia, this sentence is an important example for understanding the different sentence structures in English and Indonesian. In the SLA process, learners often transfer the structure of their first language to their second language. For example: In Indonesian → "I love my cat." These structures are almost parallel, so positive transfer occurs (facilitating learning).

On the side of the influence of simple morphological acquisition: The verb "love" does not experience major changes in its basic form (I love, you love, we love), so it is easier to understand in the early stages of learning. Possession ("my cat"): Teaching the use of possessive pronouns is important, because in Indonesian, ownership is usually expressed with a pronoun followed by a noun, similar to English. Therefore, a common challenge that appears is in the aspect of Pronouns. In English pronouns are more complex than in Indonesian (I, me, my, mine), so students sometimes confuse their functions. Common errors include: I love I cat or I love me cat, due to a lack of understanding of the function of "my".

Sentences like "I love my cat" are examples of simple, comprehensible input, essential for accelerating acquisition. Indonesian students can create interlanguage forms that combine English and Indonesian structures, such as "I loving my cat," as a progression toward correct sentences. Analyzing errors like "I love my cat" helps teachers identify students' developmental stages.

Interrogative sentence

What is your name? 'Siapa namamu'			
What Wh. word	is to be (auxiliary verb)	your S	name? complement

Interrogative sentences (questions), especially wh-questions (using the question word "What"), have the following structure: wh-word + auxiliary verb + possessive adjective + noun. "What" asks about the identity of a name. "is" connects the hidden subject ("your name") with "what." "your name" is a noun phrase → possessive adjective + noun.

Word order is often confusing for Indonesian students.

Indonesian: "Siapa nama kamu?"
(kata tanya *siapa* langsung diikuti *nama kamu* tanpa auxiliary *is*).
Penggunaan auxiliary verb ("is") sering dilupakan atau salah tempat oleh pembelajar.

Dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, kesalahan dalam penulisan yang terjadi dari siswa:
What your name? (menghilangkan "is")
What is name your? (kesalahan dalam urutan possessive)
What name your is? (pola campur aduk karena transfer negatif dari bahasa ibu)

This sentence is an example of "input" that needs to be fairly comprehensible but slightly more complex (i+1), so that students can progress. When learning, students build an interlanguage system, so they sometimes create half-correct structures (What is your name?). Because the question structures in Indonesian and English are different, negative transfer occurs → errors due to applying the rules of the first language to the second. This theory states that all humans have basic wh-questions, but specific ways (such as needing auxiliary) need to be learned specifically.

Sentence Acquisition Based on Predicates

Sentence types based on predicates can be classified into nominal sentences, verbal sentences, adjectival sentences, numeral sentences, and prepositional sentences. Students acquiring Indonesian as a second language are able to master all types of sentences: verbal, nominal, adjectival, numeral, and prepositional sentences. Meanwhile, students acquiring English as a second language are only able to master verbal sentences. However, students' mastery of verbal sentences has not varied.

Nominal sentence

I am a student		
I S	am to be	a student complement

Nominal sentences because the predicate uses a noun (not an action). Sentence Structure Pattern: Subject + to be (am) + noun phrase. I = pronoun (subject pronoun). am = linking verb, connecting the subject with the complement. a student = noun phrase > a = indefinite article, student = noun (main noun).

Students face difficulties with the use of the auxiliary "am." In Indonesian, there are usually no conjunctions like "am" (in English) when expressing status or identity.

For example: "I am a student" (in English), "I am a student" (in Indonesian) > without the word "adalah" (in Indonesian) in this context in normal conversation. As a result, Indonesian students often forget "am" (in Indonesian) when constructing sentences. Use of the Article "a":

Indonesian does not have articles ("a," "an," "the"), so students often omit them.

Learners form an "interlanguage" that blends the structures of their native language and English. For example, "I am a student" is a mix of Indonesian logic and English vocabulary. The different structure (there are no "am" and "a" in Indonesian) causes negative transfer and results in errors. Learners need a lot of understandable input, such as "I am a student," in real contexts to become accustomed to it.

Discussion

The findings of this study are truly interesting because the implications for teaching allow teachers to be aware that students bring their L1 structures into the learning process. Focus on sentence patterns and meaningful input, not just grammar rules. Furthermore, contextual activities (e.g., role-playing, storytelling, and the like) are deemed necessary so that sentences like "I go to school" are not simply memorized but also syntactically and functionally understood.

The influence of input and environment clearly impacts students' L2 abilities. In schools, formal input from teachers often focuses too much on grammar rules, rather than on the meaning of communication. If Indonesian or English input is insufficiently rich, sentences can be memorized without understanding their syntactic structure.

The sentence "I love my cat" is a simple yet effective example in the context of second language acquisition in Indonesia. The S+V+O structure, consistent with Indonesian, supports positive transfer, while elements such as possessive pronouns help enrich learners' English grammatical competence. The application of SLA theories such as the Input Hypothesis and Interlanguage is highly relevant to understanding how Indonesians learn to use this structure correctly.

The sentence "What is your name?" is an interrogative sentence with a formal structure (Wh-word + auxiliary + subject). In the context of learning English as a second language in Indonesia: The main difficulties are word order and the use of the auxiliary "is." Theories such as Interlanguage, Contrastive Analysis, and Comprehensible Input help explain how learners master these sentences gradually.

The explicit learning strategy considered appropriate is Explicit Grammar Instruction—Students need to be explicitly taught that "to be" is mandatory in this type of question. Drilling and roleplaying can also be used: Quick question-and-answer exercises help automate the "What is your ___" pattern. The sentence "I am a student" is a declarative sentence with the basic structure of Subject + to be + Noun Phrase.

In the context of second language acquisition for Indonesians, common errors occur in the use of the auxiliary "am" and the article "a." Theories such as interlanguage, negative transfer, and comprehensible input help explain the learning process. Learning should focus on basic nominal sentence patterns and article use to strengthen students' English accuracy.

Learning strategies, exercises focused on 'to be', teaching I am, you are, he/she is repeatedly in simple sentences. Practice using articles, emphasizing the difference between "a student" and "students". Repetition and drilling, repeated oral and written exercises to form the habit of using am and a. Therefore, from here we know the importance of second language learning strategies by integrating models and tools can complement the continuity of the multilingual education model (Hobbs, 2012); (Han, 2025); (Vitta & Al-Hoorie, 2023).

Second language acquisition in elementary school students is a complex process influenced by various factors, including age, environment, motivation, and learning methods. Syntactic aspects, which include sentence structure and word order, are an important focus in PB2 because they determine students' ability to form correct and meaningful sentences. Research by Hadi, Rijal, & Hanum (2021) At SDN 011 Sebulu, Kutai Kartanegara, third-grade students have mastered the lexicon of their second language. However, in terms of phonology and syntax, there are still influences from their first language, such as pronunciation influenced by their mother tongue and sentence structures that do not fully conform to the rules of their second language. Factors influencing second language acquisition in these students include motivation, age, formal presentation, their first language, and their environment (Fathi dkk., 2024); (Bitu, 2020). Zahra dan Baadillah (2024) examined the acquisition of syntax in children aged 3–5 years at Harapan I Kindergarten. The results showed that children were able to form simple and compound sentences, and use declarative, interrogative, and imperative sentences. However, some children only produced declarative and imperative sentences, indicating variation in syntactic abilities. Zulfa dan Setiawan (2021) used the Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) calculation to analyze language acquisition in 2.8-year-old children. The children reached stage VI of language development according to Brown's theory, demonstrating advanced

syntactic abilities. However, this study focused more on preschool-aged children, so the context differs from that of elementary school students.

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a complex process in which individuals learn a language other than their native tongue. For elementary school students in Indonesia, second language acquisition usually refers to learning Indonesian (for speakers of regional languages) or English (as a foreign language).

In terms of syntax, SLA involves children more in their ability to form grammatically correct sentence structures. Furthermore, they develop functional elements such as conjunctions, prepositions, and tenses. In the second language—Indonesian—the development of sentence variations includes declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences. In this process, findings indicate that second language learning is influenced by first language mastery (Vidgren, 2015); (Flynn dkk., 2004); (Maneva, 2004).

Second language acquisition (SL2) at the elementary school level involves the process of developing syntactic skills, namely the ability to arrange words into grammatical sentences. At elementary school age (6–12 years), children are in a period of rapid language development. Syntactic acquisition in a second language such as English or Indonesian (for students who speak regional languages) includes: forming simple sentences, using basic tenses, mastering subject-verb-object structures, and using interrogative and negative sentences. However, because the mother tongue (L1) is already relatively strong, the SL2 process often shows transfer from the first language structure, which affects the syntactic accuracy of the second language (Róg & Urbaniak, 2024); (Rokita-Jaśkow & Werbińska, 2023); (Ortin & Fernandez-Florez, 2019).

The next finding is that it is known that the acquisition of a second language (Indonesian) in preschool children is a preparation for entering elementary school. Children acquire a second language through natural processes (interaction) and formal (kindergarten teaching). Syntax acquisition occurs gradually: from phrases → simple sentences → complex sentences. The environment plays a very important role: children with more exposure to a second language show more grammatical sentences. Mother Tongue Dominance: All studies confirm that the mother tongue greatly influences syntax in a second language. The Importance of Input: The more often children hear and use a second language in natural and formal contexts, the better their mastery of syntax. Stages of Development: Syntax acquisition moves from form.

CONCLUSION

Based on the studies that have been conducted, it can be seen that the acquisition of syntactic aspects in a second language occurs gradually, from simple sentences to complex sentences. Syntactic errors in elementary school are often caused by negative transfer from the mother tongue. Language environment factors, learning methods, and input quality significantly influence the speed and accuracy of syntax acquisition. Pedagogical interventions, such as explicit practice of sentence structures and the creation of a second language environment, are crucial for improving syntax acquisition. Lack of exposure to a second language slows syntax. Explicit practice and natural interaction accelerate acquisition. Several things to note are the need to increase exposure to a second language in the school and home environments.

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