

## PHONOLOGICAL, SYNTAX, SEMANTIC, AND MORPHEMIC ACQUISITION IN CHILDREN AGED 4-5 YEARS AT DAYCARE AND LEARNING GROUPS OF FARHANY KHAIR ISLAMIC SCHOOL

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### ABSTRACT

Language acquisition is a natural process that occurs since a child is born through interaction with the surrounding environment. Children aged 4-5 years are in a stage of rapid language development, where they begin to understand, pronounce, and use language in various communication situations. This study aims to analyze the acquisition of Indonesian in children aged 4-5 years at Daycare and Learning Groups of Farhany Khair Islamic School in terms of phonetics, semantics, syntax, and morphemics. The research method used is a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data collection techniques used through observation and recording of children's conversations in various interaction contexts. The results of the study on phonological analysis show that children aged 4-5 years are in the stage of phonological development, especially in the pronunciation of the consonant /r/. In syntactic analysis,

children have not used the appropriate formal grammar rules, but the sentences spoken are communicative and show good language skill development. In semantic analysis, children have shown the ability to state conditions and solutions directly, can connect actions with their consequences, show an understanding of time and causal relationships, and begin to develop simple narrative flows. In the morphemic analysis, it shows that children begin to master the use of the passive prefix *di-* correctly; the morphological form is not standard, but its function as a passive verb is still understood. Children at this age tend to use free morphemes and are still in the process of acquiring affixation.

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### INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the fundamental aspects of human life that functions as a means of communication, social interaction, and self-expression (Supriadi, 2020; Dewi & Rangkuti, 2021). Since birth, children begin to acquire language through interaction with

their surroundings, especially their parents and caregivers. Language acquisition in early childhood occurs gradually, starting from the prelinguistic to linguistic stages, each of which is influenced by various factors, including environmental stimulation and communication patterns of adults around the child (Pratiwi, 2022). Language acquisition refers to the natural process that children go through in understanding and producing language, both spoken and written, from an early age through interaction with the surrounding environment (Nawaz et al., 2024).

Children aged 4–5 years are at the peak stage of language development, where they begin to form simple sentence structures, expand their vocabulary, and understand the social context of language use (Dewi et al., 2024). According to research by Tiana et al. (2022), at this stage, the quality of language input from the surrounding environment, such as teachers and peers, greatly influences children's language competence achievement. This is reinforced by research by Washington-Nortey et al. (2022) which shows that children who are in an active communication-based educational environment show better phonological and syntactic abilities.

A child's first language acquisition is highly dependent on the language input they receive from their environment. Language acquisition is a process that occurs in a child's brain when acquiring their first language, or what is known as their mother tongue. In this context, a child's interaction with parents, caregivers, and peers is an important factor in determining how a child acquires vocabulary and understands language structure (Maria et al., 2025). A study shows that children who come from families with regional language habits tend to adopt the vocabulary typical of that region in their language acquisition (Hwang, 2024).

According to Li (20224), during preschool children experience a surge in language development, marked by an increase in vocabulary and more complex grammatical understanding. Language acquisition at an early age is greatly influenced by environmental factors, including social interactions, language stimulation from adults, and language models received daily (Purba et al., 2024).

Language acquisition theories, such as behaviorism, nativism, cognitivism, and interactionism, provide different perspectives in understanding the process of children's language acquisition. According to behaviorism theory, children learn language through imitation and reinforcement from the surrounding environment. Meanwhile, the nativism theory developed by Chomsky states that humans have an innate device for learning language, known as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) (Chomsky in Khalilah et al.,

2024). In the context of early childhood education, interactionism theory emphasizes the importance of social interaction in building children's language skills (Piaget, 1954 in Siddiq et al., 2024).

Language acquisition in children aged 4-5 years is an interesting study because at this age children begin to show significant development in phonology, semantics, syntax, and pragmatics (Fauziah et al., 2024). Children begin to combine words into simple sentences, understand the relationship between words and meanings, and develop more complex communication skills. Therefore, this study focuses on the acquisition of Indonesian in children aged 4-5 years at Daycare and Learning Groups Farhany Khair Islamic School, to understand how the school environment and social interactions play a role in children's language development especially phonological, syntax, semantic, and morphemic acquisition.

Daycare and Learning Groups provide a space rich in language stimulation through structured activities such as storytelling, singing, role-playing, and daily conversations. A communicative environment encourages children to actively use language in a social context (Pradita et al., 2024). Verbal interaction between teachers and children in PAUD institutions is the main factor supporting productive language development (Downer et al., 2024). As expressed by (Isaac, 2024), early childhood education institutions have a major role in shaping the quality of language input that children receive every day. However, the language acquisition process is not only influenced by the social environment, but also by the learning approach and methods used in the classroom. The use of media, role-playing methods, and storytelling techniques can significantly improve children's mastery of language structures (Biynazarova et al., 2024).

This study was conducted at Daycare and Learning Gorups of Farhany Khair Islamic School, an early childhood education institution that applies an Islamic approach and is based on active communication in its learning process. This interactive environment is an ideal location to observe how children aged 4-5 years acquire and use Indonesian naturally in everyday contexts.

This study aims to describe the form of Indonesian language acquisition by children aged 4-5 years which includes aspects of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. In addition, this study also aims to identify the influence of the social environment and learning methods on variations in children's language abilities at that age.

The results of the study are expected to be a scientific contribution in the field of early childhood education, especially in the development of contextual, communicative, and culture-based language learning programs, and can provide in-depth insight into the patterns of early childhood language acquisition and contribute to the development of effective language learning strategies in early childhood education environments.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative method with a case study approach to deeply understand how children aged 4-5 years interact in various situations at Daycare and Learning Groups of Farhany Khair Islamic School. The location of this study is in the Anugrah Mataram Complex, Jl. Anugrah Mataram No. 9, Medan, Binjai Village, Medan Denai District. The subjects in this study were 4 children aged 4-5 years.

Data collection techniques were carried out through three main methods. First, direct observation, where researchers observe children's interactions in various situations naturally without intervention that can change their communication patterns. Second, conversation recording, where children's verbal interactions in various contexts are recorded to obtain authentic data. Third, transcription, where the results of the conversation recordings are transcribed verbatim for further analysis.

The transcribed data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative analysis approach. The analysis process begins with data reduction, namely selecting parts of the conversation that are relevant to the research objectives to be focused on in the study. Next, categorization is carried out, namely grouping patterns of child interaction in various situations based on aspects of language acquisition. The last step is interpretation, where patterns found in conversations are analyzed and arranged into conclusions that can provide a deeper understanding of language acquisition in children aged 4-5 years in the context of the case study conducted.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This study aims to describe the language acquisition of children aged 4-5 years at Daycare and Learning Groups of Farhany Khair Islamic School in the aspects of phonology, syntax, semantics, and morphemics. The results of this study were analyzed based on transcriptions of children's conversations in various interaction situations.

### **1. Phonological Acquisition**

Through phonological studies, there is data that is transcribed into text form and

phonetic. The results of the phonological study can be described as follows.

### **Conversation 1**

Teacher : Kalau kita pakai baju ungu, itu di hari apa ya?

Child M : Hali labu

Teacher : Ha? Hali labu, ada hali labu memang? Hari Rabu nak

In thematic learning activities at Daycare and Learning Groups of Farhany Khair Islamic School, a 4-year-old child mentioned the day in the context of conversation as "Hali labu", based on the context, the actual meaning of the utterance is "Hari Rabu". This utterance appeared when the teacher asked what day the child wore a purple uniform, and the child tried to mention it based on memory and habit.

Analysis of the child's utterance showed several phonological processes typical of early childhood, which are generally included in the category of phonemic substitution and distortion:

#### a. Phoneme Substitution /r/ to /l/

The word hari is pronounced as hali, and Rabu becomes labu. This is a form of gliding, which is the replacement of the liquid consonant /r/ with /l/ which is easier to pronounce (Syafitri & Arsanti, 2024).

#### b. Consonant Assimilation

In the pronunciation of labu, a kind of assimilation or sound adjustment occurs, where the child repeats the labu pattern following the initial pattern of "hali" which has undergone a replacement of /r/ to /l/. This is common because children simplify pronunciation by matching the sounds between words (Putri et al., 2025).

#### c. Simplification of Syllabic Structure

Complicated phonological structures such as the vibrating consonant /r/ in the middle of a word (hari) and the beginning of a word (\*Rabu) are simplified by children. This shows that the child's articulation system is still in the process of development and is not yet able to manage complex sounds consistently (Maassen & Terband, 2024).

Mispronunciation of the phoneme /r/ to /l/ is a common phenomenon in the early stages of phonological acquisition. Based on the theory of language development, the phoneme /r/ is classified as a complex sound and can only be mastered stably by children aged 5 years and over (Situmorang et al., 2025). This kind of phoneme substitution is a form of compensation for the limitations of the child's articulation motor skills which are still developing. Children are usually not yet able to perform the tongue vibrations needed to produce the sound /r/, so they replace it with an easier sound such

as /l/. It should be understood that this phenomenon is not a form of disorder, but a natural part of the language acquisition process. With sufficient stimulation through stories, songs, and conversations, children's pronunciation will develop towards a form that is in accordance with the rules.

In the context of early childhood education, teachers do not need to correct these errors directly. Instead, teachers can provide examples of correct sentences naturally through language modeling. This strategy provides positive reinforcement and indirect correction, in accordance with the principles of fun and supportive early childhood in phonological acquisition.

Based on the phonological analysis of Conversation 1, the utterance "Hali labu" shows that the child is in the stage of phonological development, especially in the pronunciation of the consonant /r/. Errors like this are a natural form of the language acquisition process and will develop with age and proper verbal practice. Teachers and parents play an important role in providing examples of correct pronunciation in a fun communicative context.

## **2. Syntax Acquisition**

Syntax acquisition reflects how children begin to understand and form sentence structures. In the syntactic analysis, it can be seen in the following transcript:

Child U : Cantik ibu Sifa

Teacher : Masya Allah, makasih

The sentence uttered by the child appears in the context of the child praising his teacher's appearance. This expression represents praise in the form of a short and simple sentence.

Based on Conversation 2 above, there is a syntactic analysis as follows:

### **a. Non-standard Word Order (Predicate - Subject)**

The child's sentence structure follows the order:

Predicate (adjective: Cantik) – Subject (Ibu Sifa)

In formal grammar, the correct structure should be:

"Ibu Sifa cantik." (Subject – Predicate)

However, in the syntactic development of early childhood, the use of this kind of order is natural. Children often prioritize words that are considered important or emotionally interesting – in this case, the word "beautiful". According to Fauziah (2024), early childhood often uses sentence patterns that are influenced by perception, not by

standard grammatical structures.

b. Omission (Omission of Conjunctions or Copula Verbs)

The sentence "Cantik ibu Sifa" does not contain a conjunction such as "adalah". This is a form of telegraphic speech – a two- or three-word sentence that only contains the core information, without functional words. This phenomenon is in accordance with the stages of language development according to (Ulita et al., 2025), where children eliminate elements that are considered unimportant in meaning, but important in structure.

c. Incomplete Nominal Phrase

The phrase "ibu Sifa" is a complex nominal phrase (N + N) which is correct, but is not grammatically combined with a predicate. This shows that the child has understood the basic phrase form, but has not mastered interphrase connectors (Situmorang et al., 2025).

The utterance "Cantik ibu Sifa" shows the child's ability to construct sentences that have complete meaning communicatively, although syntactically it is not yet perfect. This sentence reflects awareness of meaning (the child understands that the word "cantik" is a compliment), word selection based on emotion or main concern, development of sentence structure that develops from the two-word stage to three words.

According to Eko et al. (2024), children aged 4-5 years begin to develop sentence structures based on the linguistic experiences they hear every day, although they do not fully follow the rules of grammar.

Teachers should respond positively and insert modeling of correct sentence structures in natural forms and not correct directly. This strategy encourages children to absorb correct sentence forms indirectly through positive interactions (Hambali, 2024).

Based on the analysis above, the sentence "Cantik Ibu Sifa" is part of the stage of early childhood syntax acquisition, which is characterized by a simple sentence structure, the use of words with main meanings, and the elimination of grammatical elements that have not been mastered. Although it is not in accordance with formal grammar rules, this sentence is already communicative and shows good language skill development.

### 3. Semantic Acquisition

Semantics deals with understanding the meaning of words and their use in appropriate contexts. The transcripts obtained in this study are as follows:

#### Conversation 3

Teacher : Iya belum dijemput lagi

Child S : Jalan sendiri

Child U : Jalan, nanti tetabrak

Teacher : Jalan sendiri S? iya? Betul yaa? Ambillah tas nya, Jalan sendiri yaa?

Child U : Nanti tetabrak

Child K : tetabrak, bawak berobat

Semantic analysis focuses on how children understand and convey meaning, not just the form of sentence structure. Here are the results of the analysis of each child's utterance:

#### 1. Child S: "Jalan sendiri."

Literal meaning : Doing trip without being accompanied by another person.

Contextual meaning : The child concludes or suggests that if he has not been picked up, then the solution is to walk alone.

The analysis of the utterance is that this sentence reflects the ability to express actions and conditions, the child uses the word "sendiri" to distinguish between accompanied and unaccompanied conditions, showing mastery of relational meaning, such as "dengan" vs. "tanpa". Ulita et al. (2025) states that at the age of 4-5 years, children have begun to understand simple relational meanings and are able to use them in the context of social communication.

#### 2. Child U: "Jalan, nanti tetabrak."

Literal meaning : If you walk, you will get hit.

Contextual meaning : The child conveys warnings of the dangers of walking alone.

The analysis of the utterance is that this sentence contains a causal relationship (cause and effect): action → risk, the use of "nanti" shows an understanding of future time, an early form of mastery of temporal meaning, although there is a pronunciation error ("tetabrak" → ditabrak), the meaning of the sentence is conveyed intact. Putri et al. (2025) stated that children's ability to connect actions with consequences shows progress in mastering functional meaning.

### 3. Child U (repeating): "Nanti tetabrak."

The analysis of the utterance is that the repetition of sentences indicates the emphasis of meaning and the child's efforts to ensure that the idea conveyed is truly understood by the person he is talking to, and this utterance confirms that the child has understood the logical consequences of an action. Siregar et al. (2024) states that children often repeat the core meaning to ensure that their understanding is (Andriani et al., 2024) conveyed; this is part of the pragmatic semantic function.

### 4. Child K: "Tetabrak, bawak berobat."

Literal meaning : If you get accident, take them to the doctor.

Contextual meaning : The child continues his friend's idea. He tries to convey the follow-up action after the accident, possibly meaning "taken to the hospital" or "given medicine".

The analysis of the utterance is that the child is able to construct a sequence of events: event → solution/reaction, "Berobat" is a form of simplification (phonological distortion) but its meaning can still be guessed, showing the development of the child's ability to construct simple narratives, although it is still not perfect phonologically. At preschool age, children begin to develop the ability to construct simple narratives by understanding the relationships between events (Andriani et al., 2024).

From the semantic analysis of the conversation above, it can be concluded that children have been able to state conditions and solutions directly (walking alone), can connect actions with their consequences (getting accident), show an understanding of time (temporal) and cause-effect relationships (causal), and begin to develop simple narrative flows. Children's semantic development in this transcript reflects the use of language as a tool for logical thinking, not only as a basic communication tool. Teachers should respond to each utterance with complete and appropriate language modeling, without correcting directly. Strategies like this help children expand their semantic understanding without hindering their self-confidence.

## 4. Morphemic Acquisition

Morphemes are the smallest units in a language that have meaning. Morphemic analysis includes the study of basic words, affixes, and morphological processes such as deletion, addition, or change of word form. Here is the transcript of the following conversation.

#### Conversation 4

Teacher : Pulang? Kenapa pulang?

Teacher : Kita belum makan stoberi lagi,kita belum makan nasi lagi

Anak U : Kita belum makan... kita belum makan.. kita belum dijemput

Guru : Iya belum dijemput lagi

Anak S : Jalan sendiri

Anak U : Jalan, nanti tetabrak

The analysis related to the conversation above is:

1. The utterance of Child U: "Kita belum makan... kita belum makan... kita belum dijemput."

Keyword : dijemput

Basic morpheme : jemput

Affixation : di- (passive form)

The use of the passive affix "di-" shows that the child has begun to understand the passive form of verbs. Although the previous sentence contains repetition, the part "kita belum dijemput" is a complete and correct morphological form. Children aged 4-5 years begin to understand and use basic prefixes such as di-, me-, and ber- although not consistently. The use of passive forms such as dijemput marks the development of functional morphology (Eko et al., 2024).

2. The utterance of Child S: "Jalan sendiri."

Keyword : jalan sendiri

Jalan : free morpheme (verb)

Sendiri : free morpheme (adjective/adverb)

No affixation was found. This sentence consists of two free morphemes combined into a phrase. It shows that the child uses basic words to construct action ideas independently. This sentence reflects the use of free morpheme forms without morphological development through affixes, which is common in the early stages of children's language development (Siregar et al., 2024).

3. The utterance of Child U: "Jalan, nanti tetabrak."

Keyword : tetabrak → should: ditabrak

Tabrak : free morpheme

Te- : non-standard form for di-

The child's affix error is pronouncing te- instead of di-. This is a form of overgeneralization or morpheme replacement due to limited articulation or incomplete

mastery of morphological structures. Morphological errors in early childhood are generally caused by ignorance of the standard form, and children replace affixes with familiar sound forms (Eko et al., 2024). The meaning is still conveyed, but the morpheme form is not yet correct. This means that the child has understood the semantic function of the passive affix, but has not been able to pronounce it correctly.

So based on the analysis above, "dijemput" shows that child U is starting to master the use of the passive prefix di- correctly; "tetabrak" is a non-standard morphological form, but its function as a passive verb is still understood. Children at this age tend to use free morphemes and are still in the process of acquiring affixation. This is in accordance with the stages of morphological acquisition at the age of 4-5 years, where children begin to explore affixed words, although there is still distortion of form.

Children often use imperfect morpheme forms as part of their natural developmental process towards mastering a complete language system (Nafisah & Rakhmawati, 2025). Implications in early childhood education teachers need to respond to children's speech with the correct morphemic version without correcting directly. This strategy is called morphological modeling, which helps children form correct language structures through communicative experiences.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the results of the study, the language acquisition of children aged 4-5 years at Daycare and Learning Groups of Farhany Khair Islamic School in phonological acquisition shows that children aged 4-5 years are in the stage of phonological development, especially in the pronunciation of the consonant /r/. Errors like this are a natural form of the language acquisition process and will develop with age and proper verbal training. In syntactic analysis, children have not used appropriate formal grammar rules, but the sentences spoken are communicative and show good language skill development. In semantic analysis, children have shown the ability to state conditions and solutions directly, can connect actions with their consequences, show an understanding of time and causal relationships, and begin to develop simple narrative flows. The semantic development of these children reflects the use of language as a logical thinking tool, not only as a basic communication tool. In morphemic analysis, it shows that children begin to master the use of the passive prefix di- appropriately; the morphological form is not standard, but its function as a passive verb is still understood. Children at this age tend to use free morphemes and are still in the process of acquiring

affixation. This corresponds to the stage of morphological acquisition at the age of 4-5 years, where children begin to explore affixing words, although form distortions still occur.

For teachers, it is better to facilitate language acquisition through active interactions, such as role-playing, storytelling, and light discussions, so that children can practice using language in meaningful contexts. If a child mispronounces or constructs a sentence, the teacher simply repeats the sentence with the correct structure or pronunciation in the form of a natural response. Involve Islamic values in language learning that are in accordance with the characteristics of the school, such as the use of daily prayers, Islamic greetings, and stories of the prophets can be a rich context for developing language and character.

For parents who educate children at home, create a communicative and supportive home environment, such as routinely inviting children to talk about their daily activities, giving children time to express their opinions or tell stories without interruption. Limit exposure to gadgets, increase direct interaction. Involve children in daily activities that contain language, such as reading books together, cooking while mentioning the ingredients, or talking while playing.

For other researchers, they can expand the subject and background, such as comparing children's language acquisition in various other PAUD institution models, such as nature-based PAUD, Montessori-based PAUD, or children's boarding schools. Long-term studies should be conducted to see how language acquisition develops from early childhood to elementary school age. Other researchers can also integrate cross-disciplinary approaches, such as combining linguistics with developmental psychology and cultural studies, so that the understanding of language acquisition is more comprehensive.

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