

Indonesian Sentence Patterns of Five-Year-Old Children at Dharma Wanita Maperaha Kindergarten, Sawerigadi District, West Muna Regency

Pola Kalimat Bahasa Indonesia Anak Usia 5 Tahun di TK Dharma Wanita Maperaha Kecamatan Sawerigadi Kabupaten Muna Barat

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Page

75-83

Abstract

The ability to construct sentences is a key indicator of syntactic development in early childhood language acquisition, particularly in bilingual environments where children negotiate the use of a local language and Indonesian. This study aims to describe the Indonesian sentence patterns produced by five-year-old children at Dharma Wanita Maperaha Kindergarten (TK Dharma Wanita Maperaha), Sawerigadi District (Kecamatan Sawerigadi), West Muna Regency (Kabupaten Muna Barat). This research employed a qualitative descriptive field design. The data consisted of children's oral utterances obtained from nine five-year-old children through observation, note-taking, and audio recording. The data were transcribed, reduced, classified, and analyzed using syntactic function analysis based on the categories of subject and predicate in Indonesian grammar. The findings show three major patterns: Subject (S), Predicate (P), and Subject-Predicate (S-P). Predicate-centered utterances were the most dominant, indicating that children tend to prioritize actions, commands, prohibitions, or communicative intentions while omitting explicit subjects. Subject-only utterances appeared as nominal or pronominal fragments, whereas S-P utterances showed the emergence of minimal complete clauses. The study concludes that the syntactic development of five-year-old children in this context is still dominated by elliptical and context-dependent structures, but it has moved toward the formation of more complete clauses. The scientific contribution of this study lies in proposing a three-layer mapping of early Indonesian syntax in a bilingual kindergarten context: nominal topic fragments, predicate-centered elliptical utterances, and emerging minimal clauses.

Abstrak

Kemampuan menyusun kalimat merupakan indikator penting perkembangan sintaksis dalam pemerolehan bahasa anak usia dini, terutama pada lingkungan bilingual ketika anak bernegosiasi antara bahasa daerah dan bahasa Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan pola kalimat bahasa Indonesia anak usia lima tahun di TK Dharma Wanita Maperaha, Kecamatan Sawerigadi, Kabupaten Muna Barat. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian lapangan dengan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Data berupa tuturan lisan anak yang diperoleh dari sembilan anak usia lima tahun melalui observasi, teknik catat, dan teknik rekam. Data ditranskripsi, direduksi, diklasifikasi, dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis fungsi sintaksis berdasarkan kategori subjek dan predikat dalam tata bahasa Indonesia. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tiga pola utama, yaitu Subjek (S), Predikat (P), dan Subjek-Predikat (S-P). Pola predikat merupakan pola paling dominan yang menunjukkan bahwa anak cenderung mengutamakan tindakan, perintah, larangan, atau maksud komunikasi dengan menghilangkan subjek eksplisit. Pola subjek muncul dalam bentuk fragmen nominal atau pronominal, sedangkan pola S-P menunjukkan kemunculan klausa minimal yang lebih utuh.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a system of sound symbols used by humans to cooperate, interact, convey ideas, and form social identities. In the linguistic perspective, language is not understood merely as a communicative tool, but also as a symbolic system that exhibits phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic regularity (Chomsky, 1965; Chaer, 2014; Kridalaksana, 2007). In early childhood, language serves as the primary means for organizing experience, expressing needs, building social relations, and preparing literacy skills for subsequent levels of education (Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1983; Santrock, 2011). Accordingly, children's language development cannot be separated from their cognitive, social, and emotional development processes.

One of the key aspects of children's language development is the ability to construct sentences. Sentences reflect children's capacity to combine words into meaningful structures. In Indonesian grammar, sentence patterns can be built through Subject (S), Predicate (P), Object (O), Complement (Comp), and Adverbial (Adv) elements, producing basic patterns including S-P, S-P-O, S-P-Comp, S-P-Adv, S-P-O-Comp, and S-P-O-Adv (Alwi et al., 2010; Marafad, 2012). For young children, mastery of sentence patterns serves as an indicator of syntactic development, as it reflects children's capacity to understand inter-word relationships, determine core information, and adapt their utterances to communicative context (Brown, 1973; Bloom, 1970; Clark, 2009).

The phenomenon of sentence acquisition in five-year-old children is important to examine because this age represents a transitional phase from simple utterances to more structured ones. Language acquisition theory posits that children's syntactic development proceeds gradually from one-word utterances, two-word utterances, telegraphic speech, to more complete clauses (Brown, 1973; Tarigan, 1988; Owens, 2012). Suyadi (2010) explains that early childhood language development is characterized by the emergence of vocal responses, holophrases, telegraphic speech, simple conversation, linguistic creativity, and increasing curiosity about language. At the age of five, children are generally capable of producing simple sentences, but the structures produced are frequently still elliptical, contextual, and shaped by the social environment.

In the Indonesian context, children's sentence development becomes more complex because many children grow up in bilingual or multilingual environments. Children in regional areas often use a local language (bahasa daerah) as their first language and Indonesian as a second language or the language of schooling. This situation gives rise to a distinctive dynamic of language acquisition, particularly in terms of syntactic elements and sentence component selection (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Chaer, 2003; Nasution & Asrindah, 2021). In such environments, children's utterances not only reflect grammatical competence, but also reveal the influence of social context, family communication habits, and school interaction (Hoff, 2014; Tomasello, 2003).

Dharma Wanita Maperaha Kindergarten (TK Dharma Wanita Maperaha) in Sawerigadi District (Kecamatan Sawerigadi), West Muna Regency (Kabupaten Muna Barat), represents a relevant early childhood education environment in which to observe this phenomenon. Children in this environment live in a community where the local language is used in daily interaction, while Indonesian is used in learning activities, communication with teachers, and other school activities. Preliminary observation showed that five-year-old children were already capable of producing Indonesian utterances, but the sentence forms that emerged were not always complete. Some utterances consisted only of a subject, the majority were predicate-centered, and some had already demonstrated a Subject-Predicate pattern. This phenomenon indicates that children's sentences must be analyzed not merely as correct or incorrect forms, but as signs of ongoing syntactic development.

The urgency of this study lies in two dimensions. First, academically, studying children's sentence patterns enriches research on Indonesian language acquisition, particularly in the domain of early childhood syntax in bilingual environments. Second, practically, the research findings can help teachers and parents understand children's stages of language development, enabling language stimulation to be adapted to the children's actual abilities. According to Piaget (1959), language development is connected to children's cognitive development in constructing mental representations. Vygotsky (1978) adds that language development proceeds through social interaction and adult support. An understanding of children's sentence patterns can therefore serve as a foundation for designing communicative, contextual, and developmentally appropriate language instruction.

A number of previous studies have examined early childhood language development. Chan (2018) found that children aged 3–4 years were already capable of using basic sentence

structures, though these remained simple in form. Safira, Rahmawati, and Nuraini (2021) demonstrated that the question-and-answer method can elicit a variety of children's utterances. Indriyani (2022) examined the speaking ability of children aged 5–6 years and found development in pronunciation accuracy, intonation, and vocabulary selection. Hamidah (2018) emphasized the role of the social environment in children's language development. Lestari (2022) further affirmed that children's language development is closely related to educational psychology. These studies provide important foundations, but most focus more on instructional methods, general speaking ability, or different age groups.

The research gap that motivates this study is the limited availability of research that specifically maps the Indonesian sentence patterns of five-year-old children in the context of a bilingual kindergarten in the West Muna Regency area. Previous research has not sufficiently demonstrated how ellipsis, nominal fragments, and minimal clauses emerge simultaneously in the utterances of five-year-old children. Accordingly, this study not only describes sentence patterns but also constructs a synthesis of early syntactic development through three categories: subject fragments, elliptical predicates, and minimal Subject-Predicate clauses.

Based on the foregoing, this study focuses on the following question: what Indonesian sentence patterns are used by five-year-old children at Dharma Wanita Maperaha Kindergarten, Sawerigadi District, West Muna Regency? The study aims to describe and classify the Indonesian sentence patterns of five-year-old children based on their syntactic function, and to explain the significance of the syntactic development reflected in these patterns. The theoretical framework draws on theories of child language acquisition (Brown, 1973; Tarigan, 1988; Clark, 2009; Owens, 2012), theories of children's cognitive and social development (Piaget, 1959; Vygotsky, 1978; Bruner, 1983), and theories of Indonesian syntax (Alwi et al., 2010; Chaer, 2014; Kridalaksana, 2007; Marafad, 2012).

METHODS

This study employed a field research design with a descriptive qualitative approach. This design was chosen because the data analyzed consist of children's oral utterances in natural communication situations, not numerical scores or test results. The research is directed at describing the forms of Indonesian sentence patterns used by five-year-old children and classifying them based on syntactic function. The qualitative approach enables the researcher to attend to speech context, utterance form, and language elements that emerge naturally.

The research was conducted at Dharma Wanita Maperaha Kindergarten (TK Dharma Wanita Maperaha), Sawerigadi District (Kecamatan Sawerigadi), West Muna Regency (Kabupaten Muna Barat), during the even semester of the 2025–2026 academic year. The data source was five-year-old children enrolled at this kindergarten. From a total of 21 students, nine five-year-old children were selected as research subjects. Subject selection was conducted purposively based on the following criteria: aged five years, actively participating in classroom activities, capable of oral communication, and present during the observation process. The research data consisted of children's oral utterances in Indonesian that emerged during communication within the school environment.

The primary research instrument was the researcher, who served as observer, recorder, and data analyst. Secondary instruments included an observation checklist, an utterance recording guide, a mobile device or audio recorder, and a syntactic function classification table. The observation checklist was used to document the speech situation, speaker, interlocutor, and activity context. The recording guide was used to transcribe key utterances, while the audio recorder ensured that children's utterances could be reviewed accurately.

Data collection was carried out through observation, note-taking, and audio recording. Observation was used to monitor children's communication during school activities. Note-taking involved writing down children's utterances that contained relevant sentence patterns. Audio recording was used to document oral utterances so that data could be transcribed and verified. The transcription of utterances in the research findings retains the children's oral forms as documented in the research notes and recordings, including local particles, repetitions, nonstandard forms, and phonological inaccuracies, as these elements constitute part of the empirical evidence of children's language development.

The research procedure was carried out through several stages. First, the researcher conducted preliminary observation of children's classroom communication. Second, the

researcher recorded and noted children's utterances in natural communication situations. Third, the collected utterances were transcribed into written form. Fourth, the data were reduced by selecting utterances that exhibited Indonesian sentence patterns. Fifth, the utterances were classified based on the elements of Subject (S), Predicate (P), and Subject-Predicate (S-P). Sixth, the classification results were presented in the form of tables and descriptive narration.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis and syntactic function analysis. The analytical steps included: (1) re-reading the utterance transcripts, (2) identifying the syntactic elements present, (3) determining subject and predicate functions, (4) grouping utterances into sentence patterns, (5) presenting the data objectively in the results section, and (6) interpreting the findings against language acquisition and syntactic theories in the discussion section. Data validity was maintained through re-examination of recordings, cross-checking of transcripts with field notes, and consistency of classification criteria. With this procedure, the study can be replicated in other kindergarten contexts with comparable subjects and utterance corpora.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section presents the research findings objectively based on utterance data from five-year-old children at Dharma Wanita Maperaha Kindergarten. The data are presented in the form of sentence pattern classification without theoretical interpretation. The transcription of utterances retains the children's oral forms as documented in the research notes and recordings.

Table 1. Summary of sentence pattern distribution in the children's utterance data

No.	Sentence Pattern	Selected Data Count	Formal Characteristics	Example Utterances
1	Subject (S)	9	Utterances consisting of a noun, pronoun, or nominal phrase without an explicit predicate.	<i>aku</i> [me / I] <i>guru</i> [teacher] <i>pensil itu</i> [that pencil]
2	Predicate (P)	19	Utterances consisting of a verb, verbal phrase, adjective, prohibition, command, or question without an explicit subject.	<i>simpan saja</i> [just put it away] <i>jangan begini</i> [don't do it like this] <i>buka pintu</i> [open the door]
3	Subject-Predicate (S-P)	12	Utterances containing both a subject and a predicate element that form a minimal clause.	<i>Saya minum</i> [I drink] <i>Bu guru datang</i> [Teacher is coming] <i>bola jatuh</i> [the ball fell]

1. Subject (S) Sentence Pattern

The Subject (S) pattern was identified in utterances that displayed an agent, object, or topic of conversation without the presence of an explicit predicate. Data for the S pattern are presented in the following table.

Table 2. Data for Subject (S) sentence pattern

No.	Child's Utterance	Subject Element	Pattern
1	<i>saya juga ha</i> [me too (particle: ha)]	<i>saya</i> [I/me]	S
2	<i>punyaku itu</i> [that's mine]	<i>punyaku</i> [mine]	S
3	<i>aku</i> [me / I]	<i>aku</i> [I/me]	S
4	<i>guru</i> [teacher]	<i>guru</i> [teacher]	S
5	<i>teman sekolah</i> [school friend]	<i>teman sekolah</i> [school friend]	S
6	<i>orang sana</i> [person over there]	<i>orang sana</i> [person over there]	S
7	<i>pensil itu</i> [that pencil]	<i>pensil itu</i> [that pencil]	S
8	<i>orang itu lagi</i> [that person again]	<i>orang itu</i> [that person]	S

9	<i>tas itu</i> [that bag]	<i>tas itu</i> [that bag]	S
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2. Predicate (P) Sentence Pattern

The Predicate (P) pattern was identified in utterances that displayed an action, condition, command, prohibition, invitation, or question without an explicit subject. Data for the P pattern are presented in the following table.

Table 3. Data for Predicate (P) sentence pattern

No.	Child's Utterance	Predicate Element	Pattern
1	<i>sudah tau mi to</i> [already know (particles: mi, to)]	<i>sudah tau</i> [already know]	P
2	<i>simpan saja</i> [just put it away]	<i>simpan</i> [put away]	P
3	<i>pindah mi dan</i> [move already (particle: mi dan)]	<i>pindah</i> [move]	P
4	<i>mundur-mundur ha</i> [keep moving back (particle: ha)]	<i>mundur-mundur</i> [keep moving back]	P
5	<i>kasih basa bawahnya</i> [wet the bottom part]	<i>kasih basa</i> [make wet]	P
6	<i>iyo, kasih ulang-ulang</i> [yeah, do it over and over]	<i>kasih ulang-ulang</i> [redo repeatedly]	P
7	<i>patah terus</i> [keeps breaking]	<i>patah</i> [break]	P
8	<i>mari</i> [come on / let's go]	<i>mari</i> [come/let's]	P
9	<i>jangan cerewet</i> [don't be noisy/bossy]	<i>jangan cerewet</i> [don't nag]	P
10	<i>mau pulang</i> [want to go home]	<i>mau pulang</i> [want to go home]	P
11	<i>banyak yang beli</i> [a lot of people buy it]	<i>banyak yang beli</i> [many buying]	P
12	<i>tambah lagi</i> [add more]	<i>tambah</i> [add]	P
13	<i>jangan begini</i> [don't do it like this]	<i>jangan begini</i> [don't do this]	P
14	<i>bagaimana ini</i> [how is this / what about this]	<i>bagaimana</i> [how]	P
15	<i>ditulis dulu beginikah</i> [write it first like this, right?]	<i>ditulis</i> [write]	P
16	<i>jangan marah-marah</i> [don't keep getting angry]	<i>jangan marah-marah</i> [don't get angry]	P
17	<i>makan lagi</i> [eat again]	<i>makan</i> [eat]	P
18	<i>duduk di sini</i> [sit here]	<i>duduk</i> [sit]	P
19	<i>buka pintu</i> [open the door]	<i>buka</i> [open]	P

3. Subject-Predicate (S-P) Sentence Pattern

The Subject-Predicate (S-P) pattern was identified in utterances that contained both an agent or topic element and an action or condition element. Data for the S-P pattern are presented in the following table.

Table 4. Data for Subject-Predicate (S-P) sentence pattern

No.	Child's Utterance	Subject	Predicate	Pattern
1	<i>Rezki mundur-mundur</i> [Rezki keeps moving back]	Rezki	<i>mundur-mundur</i> [keeps moving back]	S-P
2	<i>Saya tidak berteriak</i> [I am not shouting]	Saya [I]	<i>tidak berteriak</i> [not shouting]	S-P
3	<i>Saya sudah mau pindah</i> [I already want to move]	Saya [I]	<i>sudah mau pindah</i> [already want to move]	S-P
4	<i>Saya minum</i> [I drink]	Saya [I]	<i>minum</i> [drink]	S-P

5	<i>Bu guru datang</i> [Teacher is coming]	Bu guru [Teacher]	datang [come]	S-P
6	<i>Ayu bermain</i> [Ayu is playing]	Ayu	bermain [play]	S-P
7	<i>bola jatuh</i> [the ball fell]	bola [ball]	jatuh [fall]	S-P
8	<i>lampu mati</i> [the light went out]	lampu [light]	mati [off/out]	S-P
9	<i>mereka pulang mi</i> [they went home already (particle: mi)]	mereka [they]	pulang [go home]	S-P
10	<i>sapintar memasak</i> [I am good at cooking (sa- = saya/I)]	sa-/saya [I]	pintar memasak [good at cooking]	S-P
11	<i>kosudah selesai</i> [you are already done (ko- = kamu/you)]	ko-/kamu [you]	sudah selesai [already done]	S-P
12	<i>hoohh.. ko jatuh itu</i> [oh, you fell (ko- = kamu/you)]	ko-/kamu [you]	jatuh [fell]	S-P

DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that the Indonesian sentence patterns of five-year-old children at Dharma Wanita Maperaha Kindergarten are not yet dominated by complete sentence patterns such as S-P-O or S-P-Adv, but rather by three initial patterns: S, P, and S-P. Syntactically, this demonstrates that the children have become acquainted with the basic elements of sentence construction, yet do not always produce them in their full form. This finding is consistent with the views of Brown (1973) and Bloom (1970), who argued that children's syntactic development proceeds from brief and contextual forms toward more complex structures. In this context, children's utterances cannot be assessed solely as incomplete sentences, but must be understood as early developmental forms oriented toward communicative function.

The dominance of the Predicate (P) pattern constitutes a significant finding of this study. Utterances such as *simpan saja* [just put it away], *jangan begini* [don't do it like this], *makan lagi* [eat again], and *buka pintu* [open the door] demonstrate that children more frequently convey the core action or communicative intent rather than constructing a complete grammatical structure. In language acquisition theory, this relates to the principle of children's linguistic economy — the tendency to choose the elements most meaningful for communicative purposes (Clark, 2009; Owens, 2012). The subject is not always stated because it can already be understood through situational context, the interlocutor, or the ongoing activity. The P pattern thus reveals children's pragmatic competence in utilizing context to reduce the burden of syntactic structure.

The Subject (S) pattern, appearing in forms such as *aku* [me/I], *guru* [teacher], *teman sekolah* [school friend], *pensil itu* [that pencil], and *tas itu* [that bag], indicates that children are already capable of identifying agents, objects, or topics of conversation. However, these utterances are not yet followed by a predicate that explains the action or condition. Developmentally, these forms can be understood as topical or nominal fragments that remain dependent on context (Tomasello, 2003; Hoff, 2014). Children use nominal elements to attract their interlocutor's attention or to point to specific objects. This reveals that children's referential ability develops earlier than their capacity to construct complete syntactic relationships.

The emergence of the S-P pattern in utterances such as *Saya minum* [I drink], *Bu guru datang* [Teacher is coming], *Ayu bermain* [Ayu is playing], and *bola jatuh* [the ball fell] signals more advanced development. At this stage, children are already capable of linking subject to predicate, thereby producing a minimal clause. According to Alwi et al. (2010), subject and predicate are the core elements of Indonesian sentences; accordingly, the emergence of the S-P pattern indicates that children are beginning to master the basic sentence frame. Although some forms such as *sapintar memasak* [I am good at cooking, with *sa-* as a clipped form of *saya*] and *kosudah selesai* [you are already done, with *ko-* as a clipped form of *kamu*] still exhibit oral influence or nonstandard forms, the basic S-P structure remains recognizable. This phenomenon is consistent with Dardjowidjojo (2000), who observed that children's utterances frequently display unstable forms that nonetheless grammatically indicate a language system under construction.

In the bilingual context, forms such as *mi*, *ko*, *ha*, and *to* indicate the influence of particles or local oral language habits. These particles do not alter the core sentence pattern, but function

as emphasizeers, attitude markers, or conversational context anchors. This phenomenon reinforces the views of Chaer (2003) and Nasution and Asrindah (2021) that language acquisition in Indonesia frequently occurs in contact between the local language and Indonesian. The utterances of children at Dharma Wanita Maperaha Kindergarten thus not only demonstrate syntactic development but also reflect the sociolinguistic reality of the children's learning environment.

These findings extend Chan (2018), who found that children aged 3–4 years were already capable of producing basic structures. At age five, this study found that those basic structures develop into three-layered patterns: nominal fragments, elliptical predicates, and minimal clauses. The study also aligns with Safira et al. (2021), who demonstrated utterance variation in children through classroom interaction, but makes a more specific contribution in the classification of syntactic functions. In comparison with Indriyani (2022), this study not only examines speaking ability in general but positions sentence patterns as an indicator of syntactic development that can be observed more systematically.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in the typological mapping of early syntax in five-year-old children within a bilingual kindergarten context. This mapping reveals three developmental layers: first, nominal fragments marking referential ability; second, elliptical predicates marking the dominance of communicative function; and third, minimal S-P clauses marking the early formation of complete sentence structures. This synthesis demonstrates that children's sentence development proceeds from topic indication, action expression, to the combination of agent and action. The study thus moves beyond data description toward a conceptual model applicable to reading early childhood syntactic development.

The practical implications of these findings indicate that teachers need to provide language stimulation that encourages children to expand their utterances. When a child says *buka pintu* [open the door], the teacher can expand it to *Ibu membuka pintu* [Mother opens the door] or *Saya membuka pintu* [I open the door]. When a child says *guru* [teacher], the teacher can stimulate further with the question, "*Guru sedang apa?*" [What is the teacher doing?]. This utterance expansion strategy aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) and Bruner's (1983) concept of scaffolding, namely adult support to help children reach a higher stage of language development. The research findings can therefore serve as a basis for Indonesian language instruction in early childhood education (PAUD) and kindergartens that is more responsive to children's syntactic development.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the Indonesian sentence patterns of five-year-old children at Dharma Wanita Maperaha Kindergarten (TK Dharma Wanita Maperaha), Sawerigadi District (Kecamatan Sawerigadi), West Muna Regency (Kabupaten Muna Barat), consist of three main patterns: Subject (S), Predicate (P), and Subject-Predicate (S-P). The Predicate (P) pattern was the most dominant, followed by the S-P pattern and the S pattern. The dominance of the predicate pattern indicates that children tend to convey the core action or communicative intent directly, while the subject is frequently omitted because it can be understood through context.

The primary interpretation of these findings is that the syntactic development of five-year-old children in a bilingual context is still at a transitional stage. Children have already recognized subject and predicate elements, but do not always deploy them in a complete structure. The S pattern reflects referential ability, the P pattern reflects the ability to convey communicative function economically, and the S-P pattern marks the beginning of minimal clause formation. Children's sentence development thus moves from topical fragments toward more complete sentence structures.

The scientific contribution of this study is the three-layer mapping of early Indonesian syntactic development in five-year-old children: nominal fragments, elliptical predicates, and minimal clauses. This mapping can serve as a foundation for further research on children's syntactic acquisition in bilingual communities, and as a practical reference for teachers in designing language stimulation appropriate to children's developmental stages. Future research can expand the utterance corpus, compare children from monolingual and bilingual environments, and analyze more complex sentence patterns such as S-P-O, S-P-Adv, and compound sentences.

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