

## Language Acquisition of Declarative and Imperative Sentences in five-year-old Children

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the language acquisition of a five-year-old child. This research focuses on declarative and imperative sentence forms, using a descriptive qualitative approach with recording techniques. The analysis results show that the syntactic acquisition in declarative sentences has four forms, and imperative has five. The category of language acquisition at the syntactic level is good enough because there is minimal deviation from the form of speech produced. In summary, five-year-old children will likely use declarative and imperative sentences as they develop their language skills. They may start to use declarative sentences more naturally to convey information and use imperative sentences to express commands or requests, although their usage of these sentence types may vary in complexity and grammatical accuracy. Shortly, the results showed that children's utterances dominate in imperative sentences.

**Keywords:** *language acquisition; children's language; five-year-old Children; Imperative; declarative*

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## INTRODUCTION

Human social interaction occurs because of communication between one human being and another. Communication could be done through several ways or means and one of them is through a medium called language (Sliedrecht et al., 2016; Tōugu & Tulviste, 2017). A person's language skills go through several processes and stages from childhood to adulthood. Language acquisition in a child is one of the natural processes experienced in his life. Language acquisition is generally obtained from verbal contact with the social environment in which the language is located (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Tōugu & Tulviste, 2017). Thus, language acquisition refers to the acquisition of language unconsciously and unaffected by language teaching about the system of rules in the language being studied. Instead, it is a process that occurs naturally or naturally (Mulyadi & Liauw, 2020; Natsir, 2017; & Khotimah, 2021).

Consciously or unconsciously, a child's acquisition of linguistic systems is not initially through formal teaching. A child's language acquisition is closely related to the universality of language (Anum et al., 2024). The relationship with each other leads to the existence of language elements whose order of acquisition is absolute in general. This refers to the stages of children's language acquisition, starting from crying,

screaming, laughing, making meaningless utterances, mentioning one or two words, and developing language to more complicated language structures. Experts consider the stages of the process to have begun when a child reaches the age of two to three years (Suparman, 2022; Nissa, 2022; Kholifah, 2019; & Anidar, 2017).

Usman (2015) states that a child is never formally taught to acquire a series of words in the process. However, it is obtained through the process of developing knowledge obtained empirically. The processes that occur in language acquisition empirically are what researchers want to describe in this study. According to Annas (2019), two processes occur when a child is acquiring his first language, namely: 1) the competence process and 2) the performance process. Competence is the process of mastering grammar naturally, and the performance process is the process of understanding and publishing or producing sentences. This natural process occurs when children start babbling, saying two or more words until they can finally say a perfect sentence. However, children in their language acquisition process have never been formally taught how to compose a perfect sentence (Sentosa, 2020, & Sulistyowati, 2022).

In line with the above, Delpiyani (2023) also explains that language acquisition occurs in children's brains. It occurs when children acquire their first language or mother tongue. Therefore, language acquisition is usually distinguished from language learning. Language learning relates to the processes that occur when a child learns a second language after he has acquired his first language. Language acquisition is the acquisition of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of which a child is completely unaware. It also happens in language acquisition (syntactically) by a five-year-old child named Baby Y. She has been able to compose (construct) sentences without being taught. Based on this description, the language acquisition that will be discussed in this study is syntactic acquisition. More specifically, the researcher is interested in focusing on declarative and imperative sentences spoken by five-year-old Baby Y.

Chaer (2018) explains that competence includes three grammar components: syntactic, semantic, and phonological components. The above components are commonly referred to as syntactic acquisition, semantic acquisition, and phonological acquisition. These three are not mutually exclusive but interconnected with each other. Many language acquisition experts consider that syntactic acquisition begins when children begin to be able to combine two or more words (approximately when they are 2.0 years old). Therefore, it is good to be included in one theory of syntactic acquisition. Children's language acquisition has a unitary sequence that moves from simple single-word utterances to more complex word combinations (Tarigan, 2015).

In addition, Suardi (2019) also explained that syntactic acquisition in children is a process that takes place in a child's brain and is able to assemble a unified sentence that moves from simple one-word utterances to complex word combinations. The class or class of words, phrases, or clauses filling a syntactic function is called a word category. Word categories consist of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions.

Studies on the acquisition of syntax by children have been conducted by Bellugi (1964) and Brown (1972). According to them, children's two-word utterances consist of two types of words according to the position and frequency of appearance of the words in the sentence. These two types of words became known as pivot class and open class. Pivot grammar theory was born based on these two types of words. Next came Chomsky's generative transformation grammar (1977). His influence on the study of children's syntactic development is felt. According to Chomsky, certain grammatical relationships are universal and shared by all languages worldwide. Based on Chomsky's theory, children's knowledge of these universal grammatical relations is "conscientious". In the process, it directly affects children's syntactic acquisition from its early stages. Thus, syntactic acquisition is determined by these universal grammatical relations. Concerning the theory of conscience grammatical relations, Bloom (1970) says that the relationship of grammatical relations without reference to situational information (context) is insufficient to analyse children's speech or language.

In addition to the above theories of syntactic acquisition, Tarigan (2018) explains that there is also a so-called complex cumulative theory based on the data he collected. The sequence of syntactic acquisition by children is determined by the cumulative semantic complex of morphemes and the cumulative grammatical complex being acquired. So, it is not at all determined by the frequency with which those morphemes or words appear in adult speech. There are several stages of Syntactic acquisition, including :1)Pre-lingual period (children aged 0.0-1.0). 2). One-word sentence period (children aged 1.0-2.0). This stage is also called the holophrastic stage (first linguistic stage). This is the one-word stage, which starts around the age of one. 3). The period of sentences with a series of words (children aged 2.0-3.0). At this stage, children will begin to produce two-word utterances. This second linguistic stage usually starts around the second birthday. 4). Simple construction period (children aged 3.0-5.0). In the grammar stage towards adulthood, children begin with more complex grammatical structures, which involve combining simple sentences with complementation, relativisation and conjunctions.

Fromkin and Rodman (1993) mentioned that the results of the imitation done by the child will not be the same as what the adult wants. If the adult asks the child to say "He's going out", the child will pronounce it with "He went out". Another theory says that a child learns by reinforcement, meaning that if a child learns correct utterances, he/she gets reinforcement through praise, e.g. good, clever, etc. However, if utterances are correct, he/she gets reinforcement through praise. However, if the utterances are wrong, they receive "negative reinforcement", e.g. again, wrong, not good. This view assumes that the child should be constantly corrected if his utterances are wrong and praised if they are right.

Syntax deals with the structuring and arrangement of words into larger units, called syntactic units, namely words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and discourse (Levinson, 1983). Generally, it is a series of words arranged by the applicable rules. Each word belongs to a word class or category and has a function in the sentence. The

order of the series of words and the types of words used in the sentence also determine the type of sentence produced. In terms of form, sentences can be single sentences or compound sentences. According to Chaer (2018), in terms of mode or meaning, sentences can be divided into declarative sentences (news sentences), interrogative sentences (question sentences), imperative sentences (command sentences), and interjective sentences (sentences that express emotions). Considered in terms of terms, the meaning of these kinds of sentences is clear: news sentences convey news statements, interrogative sentences ask questions, command sentences give orders to those concerned, and interjective sentences are used to express emotions.

According to the viewpoint put forward by Chaer (2018), seen from the purpose of its use, 1) Declarative sentences can be divided into sentences that: a) only to convey factual information regarding the surrounding nature or the speaker's experience; b) to express a decision or judgement; c) to state an agreement, warning, advice, and so on; d) to express congratulations or a success or express concern for a misfortune; e) to give someone an explanation, information, or details. 3) Imperative sentences can be divided into: a) command sentences, b) appeal sentences, c) prohibition sentences. Thus, this study will specifically discuss the use of declarative and imperative sentences on the speech data obtained from Baby Y as an informant in this study.

Understanding language development in children is a fascinating aspect of cognitive psychology. Declarative and imperative sentences are significant in early language acquisition among the various linguistic structures. Declarative sentences convey information or make statements, while imperative sentences express commands or requests (Aldosari, 2019). Exploring how five-year-old children comprehend and produce these sentence types sheds light on their cognitive abilities and linguistic development.

Children are typically in the midst of significant language development at the age of five. They have acquired a considerable vocabulary and are beginning to grasp the complexities of syntax and grammar. Declarative sentences allow them to express their thoughts, observations, and desires (Soni et al., 2023), while imperative sentences enable them to exert influence and interact with their environment (Saragih et al., 2023). Understanding how children navigate between these two sentence types provides insight into their communicative intentions and social interactions.

This research focuses on declarative and imperative sentences in five-year-old children on their communication functions. Studying how children use these sentence types in different contexts reveals their understanding of language rules and their ability to adapt their speech to suit various communicative purposes. Additionally, investigating any developmental patterns or individual differences in the production and comprehension of declarative and imperative sentences offers valuable insights into the underlying mechanisms of language acquisition in early childhood.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach because it aims to understand the phenomenon experienced by the research subject, for example,

behaviour, perception, motivation, action, and so on (Herman et al., 2021). Therefore, data collection is in words, sentences, statements or in-depth descriptions, not numbers (Moleong, 2019).

According to Mahsun (2014), one of the methods and techniques of providing data is the recording technique (Barreda, 2016; Kerry Linfoot, 2007). The object of research in this study is five-year-old Baby Y. The data were collected and analysed in words, sentences, statements or in-depth descriptions. The data collection and analysis were carried out with the following steps: 1) Recording the object that is speaking (saying sentences/syntax); 2) Transcribing the recording; 3) Identifying sentences according to their form (declarative and imperative) by using a coding system and tabulation model; 4) Providing interpretation of the analysis results.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Baby Y's language acquisition at the syntactic level is quite good. This can be seen from the data obtained. Baby Y's syntactic acquisition has reached the stage of a simple construction period because Baby Y has reached five years old. The simple construction period occurs in children aged three to five years. Children have started to speak with simple sentences at this age and gradually become complex sentences. In addition, in conducting conversations, Baby Y already understands the meaning of each utterance.

The use of simple sentences in five-year-old children is a crucial aspect of their language development. Children are actively expanding their vocabulary and grasping the fundamental rules of grammar at this age (Toth et al., 2020). Simple sentences, characterized by their basic structure with a single subject and predicate, serve as the building blocks for more complex linguistic constructions. Observing how children employ simple sentences provides valuable insights into their cognitive abilities and linguistic proficiency (Niklas et al., 2016; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003).

Five-year-old children often rely heavily on simple sentences to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. These sentences allow them to communicate efficiently while navigating the complexities of language. Through simple sentences, children demonstrate their understanding of syntax, sentence structure, and their growing vocabulary (Teh & Pilus, 2019). Furthermore, the simplicity of these sentences enables children to focus on conveying their intended message without getting bogged down by intricate grammatical rules.

Research on the use of simple sentences in five-year-old children highlights the importance of context and social interactions in language development. Children often adapt their speech patterns based on the situation and the individuals they communicate with. Researchers can gain insight into their pragmatic skills and communicative competence by observing how children utilise simple sentences in various contexts. Moreover, studying any developmental patterns or individual differences in the use of simple sentences sheds light on the factors influencing language acquisition in early childhood, such as parental input, environmental stimuli, and innate cognitive abilities.

## 1. Acquisition of Declarative Form Sentences

Understanding the intricacies of language acquisition in young children is a topic of great interest in developmental psychology (Azucar et al., 2018; Slonje & Smith, 2008). Among the various linguistic structures children acquire, declarative sentences are a fundamental aspect of their communicative repertoire (Nida & Wonderly, 1971). Declarative sentences, which convey statements or information about the world, play a crucial role in allowing children to express their thoughts, share their experiences, and engage in social interactions. Investigating the acquisition of declarative sentences in five-year-old children provides valuable insights into the cognitive processes and developmental milestones involved in language acquisition during early childhood.

At the age of five, children have typically undergone substantial linguistic development, characterized by expanding their vocabulary and refining their grammatical skills. They are increasingly capable of constructing complex sentences and conveying nuanced meanings through language. Declarative sentence acquisition in five-year-old children marks an important stage in their linguistic development as they begin to master the syntax and semantics necessary for producing and comprehending declarative statements effectively (Hossain & Fatema, 2022). By examining how children acquire and utilize declarative sentences in various contexts, researchers gain a deeper understanding of the cognitive mechanisms underlying language development during this critical childhood period.

The analysis of declarative sentence acquisition is presented in tabulated form using the following coding system:

- 1.a. Declarative sentences to convey factual information regarding the surrounding nature or the speaker's experience.
- 1.b. Declarative sentences to express a decision or judgement.
- 1.c. Declarative sentences to express agreements, warnings, advice, and so on.
- 1.d. Declarative sentences to express congratulations or success or to express regret for a misfortune.
- 1.e. A declarative sentence to give someone an explanation, information, or details.

**Table 1. Declarative Sentence Acquisition Analysis**

No	Data	Sentence Type Code	Description
1	<i>Tadi aku lihat ada mamang somai lewat loh, tapi nggak berenti di depan rumah kita.</i>	1.a	The data contains factual information from the speaker about his experience.
	I saw a <i>mamang somai</i> passing by, but he didn't stop in front of our house		
2	<i>Besok di Chandara aku mau beli susu coklat aja ya nda, nggak usah beli jajan biar</i>	1.b	The data contains sentences from speakers who state their decisions.

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<i>nggak batuk.</i>			
Tomorrow at Chandara, I'll just buy chocolate milk, no need to buy snacks so I don't cough.			
3	<i>Iya nda, jajan itu aja.</i>	1.c	The data contains sentences agreeing with her mother's decision.
Yes, that's it, snacks.			
4	<i>Tadi Wawa jatuh loh dari sepedah, tangannya berdarah, kasian banget dia nangis.</i>	1.d	The data contains sentences from speakers who express concern..
Wawa had fallen off her bike, her hand was bleeding, she was crying.			
5	<i>Kata Bu guru besok bekalnya suruh bawa sayur hijau, buah, ikan sama susu.</i>	1.e	The data contains sentences from speakers who give detailed explanations.
The teacher said to bring green vegetables, fruit, fish and milk tomorrow.			

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The acquisition of declarative sentences in five-year-old children marks a significant milestone in their linguistic development. Declarative sentences, which convey information or make statements about the world, play a crucial role in enabling children to express their thoughts, observations, and experiences (Saragih et al., 2023; Soni et al., 2023). Children typically demonstrate a solid grasp of basic grammar and vocabulary by this age, allowing them to construct declarative sentences with increasing complexity and precision. Understanding the process of declarative sentence acquisition sheds light on the cognitive mechanisms underlying language development in early childhood.

Five-year-old children exhibit remarkable proficiency in producing and comprehending declarative sentences, reflecting their growing linguistic competence. They are able to construct sentences that accurately convey their intended messages and effectively communicate with others. Through interactions with caregivers, peers, and their environment, children acquire the necessary language skills to formulate declarative sentences that reflect their understanding of the world around them. Moreover, as children encounter a wide range of linguistic input in their everyday lives, they adapt their speech to suit different contexts and social situations.

## 2. Imperative Form Sentence Acquisition

Understanding the acquisition of imperative sentences in five-year-old children sheds light on their developing linguistic abilities and social interactions. Imperative

sentences, which express commands or requests, play a crucial role in children's communicative repertoire as they navigate their environment and interact with others (Saragih et al., 2023). Investigating how children acquire and utilize imperative sentences offers valuable insights into the cognitive processes and developmental milestones of language acquisition during early childhood.

By age five, children typically undergo significant linguistic development, expanding their vocabulary and honing their grammatical skills. Imperative sentence acquisition in five-year-old children marks an important stage in their linguistic development as they begin to understand and produce sentences that exert influence and control over others. Children demonstrate an increasing ability to express their desires, make requests, and negotiate social interactions using imperative sentences at this age. Examining the acquisition of imperative sentences in five-year-old children provides researchers with a window into the complex interplay between language, cognition, and social development during this critical period of childhood.

Research into imperative sentence acquisition in five-year-old children explores various factors that influence their linguistic development, including parental input, environmental stimuli, and individual differences in cognitive abilities. Researchers gain insights into the cognitive mechanisms underlying language development and social communication skills by examining how children learn to use imperative sentences in different contexts. Moreover, studying imperative sentence acquisition in five-year-old children contributes to understanding the broader processes involved in language acquisition and cognitive development, informing interventions to support children's language learning and social interactions.

As with the previous analysis, the analysis of syntactic acquisition in imperative sentences is also presented in tabulated form with a coding system as follows:

- 2.a. A command sentence expects a reaction in the form of a physical action
- 2.b. Prohibitory sentences expect a response of not doing something mentioned in the sentence.

**Table 2. Imperative Sentence Acquisition Analysis**

No	Data	Sentence Type Code	Description
1	<i>Bapak, ambil jambu itu sih!</i>  Father, get that guava anyway!	2.a	The data contains sentences from speakers in the form of command sentences that expect a reaction in the form of physical action.
2	<i>Kakak nanti pulang sekolah jangan lupa beliin jajan ya!</i>	2.a	The data contains sentences from speakers in the form of command sentences that expect reactions in the form of physical actions.



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	Sister, when you get home from school, don't forget to buy snacks!		
3	<i>Mas jangan kebut-kebut sepedahnya nanti jatuh terus berdarah!</i>	2.b	The data contains sentences from speakers in the form of command sentences that expect answers in the form of not doing something mentioned in the sentence.
	<i>Mas, don't speed up the bike, it will fall and bleed!</i>		
4	<i>Bunda, jangan ke keluar nanti basah kena hujan!</i>	2.b	The data contains sentences from speakers in the form of command sentences that expect answers in the form of not doing something mentioned in the sentence.
	Mum, don't go out in the rain!		
5	<i>Kak, ayo ke pasar! Aku mau beli sepatu untuk sekolah besok.</i>	2.a	The data contains sentences from speakers in the form of command sentences that expect a reaction in the form of physical action.
	Sis, let's go to the market! I want to buy shoes for school tomorrow.		

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The acquisition of imperative sentences in five-year-old children represents a pivotal stage in their linguistic development. Imperative sentences, which convey commands or requests, are essential for children as they assert their needs, desires, and intentions in social interactions. By mastering imperative sentence structures, children gain the ability to influence their environment and engage in cooperative activities with others. Understanding the process of imperative sentence acquisition in five-year-olds provides valuable insights into their cognitive abilities and social communicative skills (Gudjonsson, 2003; Evans, 2000; Tak, 1999).

Five-year-old children demonstrate increasing proficiency in producing and comprehending imperative sentences, reflecting their growing linguistic competence and social awareness. Children learn to use imperative sentences effectively to express their wishes, give instructions, and negotiate social roles and responsibilities through interactions with caregivers, peers, and other adults. Furthermore, the acquisition of imperative sentences involves mastering grammatical structures and understanding pragmatic conventions and social norms governing language use in different contexts.

## CONCLUSION

The language acquisition at the syntactic level of Baby Y as the object of research can be said to be quite good. There are very minimal deviations in the speech produced. At this stage (five years old) children's language acquisition is at the stage of sentence development. The child is familiar with dialogue patterns and understands when it is his turn to speak and when it is his interlocutor's turn to speak. In relation to

the analysis of syntactic acquisition on some of the sentence forms mentioned in the discussion of this paper, it is found that Baby Y's syntactic acquisition is dominated by declarative sentence forms, followed by imperative sentence forms.

This means that under any circumstances, when speaking, especially for a child who has entered a stage called the stage of producing a simple and complex construction, the syntax of declarative sentence forms will dominate the acquisition of syntax. The researcher believes that this paper is still far from perfect, therefore, it will be very helpful if the readers provide input or suggestions that can improve the shortcomings of this research.

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