

# Investigating the Acquisition of Affixes by a Four-Year-Old Girl

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## Abstract

This paper tries to investigate the acquisition of Indonesian language affixes by a four-year-old girl. Using an exploratory design, this research, which spent two months period of observation, reveals that object of the study has not only acquired the simple affixes (combination of prefix and suffix) but also started showing her potency of producing the complex ones (the combination of prefix, infix, and suffix). However, the production of such complex affixes (the combination of prefix, infix, and suffix) can not be automatically categorized as the acquired ones due to their rare occurrences. It is suggested that the next similar research to be applied to other four years old girls for generalization purpose.

*Key words:* Affixes, Acquisition, Four-year-old girl

## INTRODUCTION

The study on second language acquisition (henceforth SLA) has been widely carried out by many researchers in which their emphases differ from one another. The large study on SLA might result from the complexity of study area of the SLA itself which has then led to the appearance of numerous theoretical foundations of how a language is acquired.

This paper tries to investigate the acquisition of Indonesia language as a second language, focusing on the acquisition of affixes by a four-year-old girl. Although there have been a number of similar studies but they, mostly, were not specific to four-year-old girl. In other words, the study on the acquisition of Indonesian language affixes carried out specific to a four-year-old girl is still rarely conducted.

One of the studies that could be best shown here is by Raja (2003). However, his focus was to investigate early morphological development of Indonesian children of various ages. In

his study, the acquisition of affixes by those children was highlighted.

For this reason, the writer wanted to conduct similar study, but with different object that was a four-year-old girl. Two-month-intensive observation was conducted in order to support the data needed for this study.

This present study was aimed at investigating types of affixes produced by a four-year-old girl and further identifying whether such production of affixes can be categorized as the acquired ones.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Syntactic development

The syntactic development of children grows in line with their age. According to Yule (1986), there are several stages of a child's syntax development. The detail is explained as follows:

#### *Pre-language stage*

This stage takes place from three to ten months. During this period, there

are a lot of 'sound play' and attempted imitations.

### ***The one-word or holophrastic stage***

Holophrastic is a single form functioning as phrase or sentence. This stage happens between twelve and eighteen months. Single terms uttered are usually related to everyday objects such as 'milk', 'cookie', 'cat', and 'cup'.

### ***The two-word stage***

Around eighteen to twenty months, as the child's vocabulary moves beyond fifty distinct words, they can produce two separate words.

### ***Telegraphic speech***

It occurs from two years and up. A child at this stage starts producing a large number of utterances, which could be classified as multiple word utterances. While this type is being produced, a number of grammatical inflections begin to appear in some of words.

In addition, Crystal (1976) added that by the time the child is three years old and up, he or she is going further than telegraphic speech forms and integrate some of inflectional morphemes, which signify the grammatical function and the nouns and verbs used. This acquisition of this form is often accompanied by a process of generalization. Therefore, imitation is not the primary force in child language acquisition

### **Morphemes**

There are two basic types of morphemes: unbound and bound. Unbound or free-standing morphemes are individual elements that can stand alone within a sentence, such as <cat>, <laugh>, <look>, and <box>. They are essentially what most of us call words. Bound morphemes are meaning-bearing units of language or called affix, including

prefixes and suffixes that are attached to unbound morphemes. These cannot stand alone (Yule, 1986).

The meaningful combination of morphology is called a morphological construction of which can be built by several means like affixation and reduplication.

### ***Morphological acquisition***

In learning a language, children generally focus on the simple aspects of language instead of the complex ones. Miller (in Raja, 2003) in his theory of Derivational Complexity said that the extent of derivation which has to be passed on by a child determines the sequence of the child's sentence production.

There are two learning that determine the sequence of a child's sentence production: system learning and item learning (Ellis, 1997). System learning refers to learning separate and discrete items of language. When a learner has learnt the underlying rules of linguistic item but fails to use them, it can be said the learner makes a mistake. On the contrary, deviation in usage due to lack of knowledge of the underlying rules of linguistic item, the learner cannot be said of making mistake but error. Usually, to distinguish whether it is a mistake or an error can be done by asking the learner to correct his or her deviant utterances (Ellis, 1997).

### ***Affixation***

Affixation is the morphological process whereby grammatical or lexical information is added to a stem (Crystal, 1980). There are three types of affixation: prefix, suffix, and infix. According to Tata Bahasa Baku Bahasa Indonesia (2000), the rules of affixation in Indonesian language are given below:

Table 1.  
*The Rules of Affixation in Indonesian*

Prefix	Rules	Examples
{meng-}	1. If it is attached to the root word which has the first phoneme /a/, /i/, /u/, /e/, /o/, /ə/, /k/, /g/, /h/. ( <i>meng-</i> does not change).	<i>mengambil, mengikat, mengukur, mengelak, mengolah.</i>
	2. If it is attached to the root word which has the first phoneme /l/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /ñ/, /r/, /y/, /w/. ( <i>meng-</i> changes into <i>me-</i> )	<i>melatih, memakan, menamakan, menganga.</i>
	3. If it is attached to the root word that begins with phoneme /d/, /t/. ( <i>meng-</i> changes into <i>men-</i> ).	<i>mendatangkan, menuduh, menduga.</i>
	4. If it is attached to the root word that begins with phoneme /b/, /p/, /f/. ( <i>meng-</i> changes into <i>mem-</i> )	<i>membabat, mematuhi, membuat.</i>
	5. If it is attached to the root word that begins with /c/, /j/, /s/, /š/. ( <i>meng-</i> changes into <i>meny-</i> )	<i>menyatukan, menyadari.</i>
	6. If it is attached to the root word that has one syllable. ( <i>meng-</i> changes into <i>menge-</i> )	<i>mengebom, mengebor</i>
	7. Prefix <i>meng-</i> in the beginning of foreign words that begins with /s/ changes into <i>meny-</i>	<i>menyukkseskan,</i>
	8. If there is reduplication of a verb that has single root, that word is reduplicated by maintaining the breaking of its first consonant. The root word that has one syllable, maintains <i>nge-</i> in front of the reduplicated root word. If there is a suffix, it is not reduplicated.	<i>menulis-nulis, mengarang-ngarang, mengecek-ngecek.</i>
{ber-}	1. Prefix <i>ber-</i> changes into <i>be-</i> if it is attached into the root word that begins with phoneme /r/. 2. Prefix <i>ber-</i> changes into <i>be-</i> if it is attached into the root word's first syllable ended with /ər/.	<i>beranting, berunding, berantai. bekerja, beserta.</i>
	3. Prefix <i>ber-</i> changes into <i>bel-</i> if it is attached into certain root words.	<i>belajar.</i>
	4. Prefix <i>ber-</i> does not change if it attached into another roots beside rule above.	<i>berlayar, bermain.</i>
	{ter-}	1. Prefix <i>ter-</i> changes into <i>te-</i> if it is attached into the root word that begins with phoneme /r/.
2. If the first syllable of the root word ended with /ər/, phoneme /r/ is prefix <i>ter-</i> sometimes will emerge and sometimes will not.		<i>terpercaya, tercermin, terjernih, tepercik, tepergok.</i>
3. Besides the rule above, <i>ter-</i> does not change.		<i>terluka, terpilih</i>
{di-}	If it is attached into any root words, it does not change its form.	<i>dibeli, diambil</i>

Suffixes	Rules	Examples
{-i}	Suffix -i does not experience any changes if it is added to any root words. However, it is necessary to remember that any root words that end with phoneme /i/ cannot be followed by suffix -i	<i>kicauan, harapan.</i>
{-an}	Suffix -an does not experience any changes if it is combined with any root words. If a root word's phoneme is /a/, it will be equated with suffix -an in writing.	<i>bersamaan, lapangan.</i>

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study took place at the writer's home. The writer made his own daughter named Wiya as the object for his research. Wiya was four-years old when this research was carried out. In order to gain and collect the data needed for his research, the writer investigated all affixes produced by the object when she was communicating with her little brother, her mother, and her father (the writer

himself). This process took place about two months long before then all the data were interpreted qualitatively.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the research that spent about two months long, the writer has found variety of affixes produced by Wiya. Each type of the affixes is presented in several tables as follow:

Table 2.  
*Variety of Affixes*

Affix	Utterances
{di-}	<i>Dijilat</i> , in " <i>Rotinya dijilat dulu ya de</i> ". <i>Dipencet</i> in " <i>Dede, semutnya jangan dipencet dong!</i> " <i>Diusir</i> in " <i>Masa temen-temennya diusir</i> ". <i>Dibuang</i> in " <i>mainannya jangan dibuang dong de!</i> " <i>Dibeli</i> in " <i>Bonekanya dibeli dong, ma!</i> " <i>Ditutup</i> in " <i>Pintunya ditutup dong</i> ". <i>Dilihat</i> in " <i>Malu dilihat orang</i> ". <i>Diinjak</i> in " <i>diinjak mainannya ntar</i> ".
{ter-}	<i>Terasa</i> , in " <i>Terasa banget pedasnya, ma</i> "

The table above shows that Wiya has been able to produce affixes. However, type of affixes produced was simple and so limited in number. There were only prefix *di* and prefix *ter* that were found.

The first prefix produced was *di* which was the most frequently produced by Wiya. This type of suffix was uttered as many as eight times. She seemed to have the ability to combine such prefix with other words. This means that Wiya has acquired that type of affix. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) said that that a

bound morpheme, which in this case is the prefix *di*, is regarded 'acquired' when a child has produced it with three different free forms. The table shows that prefix *di* appeared many times or more than three times. So, it can be concluded that the production of prefix *di* is categorized or regarded 'acquired'.

In the meantime, the prefix *ter* appeared one time only. Its occurrence was never heard again. Therefore, this type of affix could not be categorized as the acquired as required by Larsen-Freeman and Long.

Table 3.  
*{di-} plus {-in} Affixes*

Affix	Utterances
{di-} plus {-in}	<i>Dirasain</i> , in “ <i>Dirasain dulu ya minumannya</i> ”. <i>Dilemparin</i> in “ <i>Dilemparin aja pensilnya</i> ”. <i>Disorakin</i> in “ <i>Masa temen-temennya disorakin gitu</i> ”. <i>Dibuangin</i> in “ <i>Mainannya jangan dibuangin dong de</i> ”. <i>Dimainin</i> in “ <i>Bonekanya jangan dimainin!</i> ” <i>Diciumin</i> in “ <i>Diciumin mulu Wiyanya</i> ”. <i>Dikabarin</i> in “ <i>Kalau dah nyampe dikabarin Wiyanya ya, nek</i> ”. <i>Dibasahin</i> in “ <i>Dede nakal, baju kakak dibasahin</i> ”.

The affixes shown in the second table above are another type of suffix combination produced. The table shows that Wiya has shown her capability in producing complex affixes i.e. the combination of prefix *di-* and suffix *-in*. This time, such complex affixes were all stated in informal utterances. However, it can be said that she has acquired those types of affixes. The reason is, in line with Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), she was able to combine the prefix *di-* and

suffix *-in* three or more different free forms.

It seemed that Wiya’s acquisition of bound morphemes at his age starts to develop and increase. This finding is in line with a research by Patuan Raja (2003) saying that number of child’s vocalizations containing bound morphemes generally increase from three up to four years, while vocabulary acquisition experiences remarkable decrease.

Table 4.  
*{meng-} plus {-kan} Affix*

Affix	Utterances
{meng-} plus {-kan}	<i>menyalakan</i> in “ <i>Soalnya mama menyalakan lampu dulu</i> ”. <i>memandikan</i> in “ <i>Mama mau memandikan kamu dede</i> ”. <i>menggambarkan</i> in “ <i>Kakak mau menggambarkan ayam</i> ”. <i>Memasukkan</i> in “ <i>Papa memasukkan motor ma</i> ”.

Similarly, the utterances listed in Table 3 also contain two affixes. However, in the table, the combination of prefix *meng-* and suffix *-kan* were produced or uttered in formal language.

The table shows that Wiya has shown her linguistic potential development as indicated by her successful combination of such prefixes and suffixes. What can be described about Wiya is that at her age, the capability in lexicalizing words has developed. Mostly, the lexicalization capability happened in the words which are categorized as having

high intensity or the words which are frequently used in daily communication.

However, word lexicalization produced is not always correct. The table above shows Wiya’s incorrect use of “*menggambarkan*”. “*Menggambarkan*” in that utterance should be “*menggabar*”. However, Wiya was successful in combining the prefix and suffix although not constructed correctly. This phenomenon seems to be much in line with Patuan Raja (2003) saying that children in developing their morphology might create their own bound forms only

before a period of successful utilization. It also can be said that she has acquired those types of affixes since Wiya has been

able to produce it more than three different free forms.

Table 5.

*{meng-} plus {-per-} plus {-i} Affixes*

Affix	Utterances
{meng-} plus {-per-} plus {-i}	Memperbaiki in “Wiya mau memperbaiki sepeda dulu”.

Table 6.

*{meng-} plus {-per-} plus {-kan} Affixes*

Affix	Utterances
{meng-} plus {-per-} plus {-kan}	Memperkenalkan in “Wiya memperkenalkan teman dulu ya”.

The utterances described in tables 4 and 5 above might be the most important finding in this research. Types of affixes produced by Wiya were different as compared to affixes presented in the previous tables.

The two tables above show that there are three types of affixes combined by Wiya. The first is the combination of prefix *meng* plus infix *per* plus suffix *i*. The second is the combination of prefix *meng* plus infix *per* plus suffix *kan*. However, the appearance of such complex combination of affixes was quite rare to happen. There were no any similar combinations of such affixes found during this observation. Therefore, the utterances of *memperkenalkan* and *memperbaiki* can not be regarded ‘the acquired’.

They are not acquired because Wiya did not produce such affixes in other forms. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) said that that a bound morpheme, which in this case is combination of prefix *meng-* plus infix *-per-* plus suffix *-i* and the combination of prefix *meng-* plus infix *-per-* plus suffix *-kan*, is regarded ‘acquired’ when it is produced in three different free forms.

**CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

Based on the findings presented above, it could be concluded that the obvious acquisition of affixes has already

taken place by age of four years. At this age, type of affixes produced was not only limited to the simple form but also the production of complex combination of affixes.

However, the production of complex combination of affixes by the object in this study can not be automatically said as the acquired ones. This is because that the production of such complex affixes only happened one time when this study was carried out. As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) said that that a bound morpheme, which in this case is combination of prefix plus infix plus suffix, is regarded ‘acquired’ when it is produced in three different free forms. It is assumed that there must be a factor that has led the object to produce such non-acquired complex combination of affixes. Despite not ‘acquired’, what it may be taken into account is that this study at least shows that a four year old child already has the potency to acquire complex affixes.

To conclude this paper, the writer suggests that similar studies involving more objects are necessary to be carried out because any child’s language development inevitably reflects universal, language-specific, and idiosyncratic characteristics. Secondly, it should be investigated further whether other

children do have a tendency and potential to create complex combination of affixes.

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