

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

The world is currently moving toward the globalization resulting in the need of the ability to communicate in a lingua franca - one of which is English. The awareness of this need is increasing tremendously among well-educated Indonesian families. Consequently, there are now lots of Indonesian families – especially those of the upper socio-economic community living in big cities like Jakarta and Surabaya - use English for their daily communication. Parents - despite of the level of their English proficiency - speak English to their children since they are born, hoping that their children will become proficient in English as they are growing. This condition is supported by the existence of internationally-standardized schools which are legalized through the National Education System (no. 20/2003) and the Government Regulation no 19/2005 which is now renewed by the latest regulation of the Ministry of Education no 31/2014 (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan No. 31/2014). Some of these schools are bilingual while some even use English solely as their language of instructions and communication. In this kind of schools,

children speak English either as their first or second language. This leads to the increase of bilingual children in this community--a trending phenomenon in the society.

These bilingual students generally speak English and Indonesian quite fluently. They are capable of expressing their ideas in English pretty well especially in oral daily communication and interactions. However, some of them are struggling in expressing their ideas in written while some others are able to write their ideas very well. As Ott (2013) states that both oral and written languages are essential for academic success, studying in bilingual schools demands the students not only speak fluent English but also write good English. They are required to write in English in most (if not all) of the subjects offered at school – ranging from a simple note to a more-complex written report. This, of course, requires students to have a writing skill which enables them to communicate their ideas effectively.

According to Steve Peha (2003), a good writing should have the following criteria: (1) Ideas that are interesting and important, (2) Organization that is logical and effective, (3) Voice that is individual and appropriate, (4) Word Choice that is specific and memorable, (5) Sentence Fluency that is smooth

and expressive, and (6) Conventions that are correct and communicative. Looking at those criteria of good writing, it is not surprising that Kroll (in Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 230) considers producing a successful written text as a complex task. Thus, it is no wonder that fluent speaker of English is not automatically a good English writer.

The above reality has brought a curiosity to further study about bilingual students' writing ability specifically their syntactic structures with the focus on the level of syntactic maturity. This is based on the argument that syntax is used to express meanings (Menyuk, 1976 and Fotos in Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 207), that is supported by Olshtain's statement (in Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 207) that inaccurate structure in written product may render the message unintelligible. Hence, it implies the important role of syntactic structures and linguistic accuracy in the written text.

Nippold (2000) as cited by Ott (2013) states that syntax develops gradually and subtly during adolescence; that's why, it is also important to see how the syntactic maturity develops across the grade levels. It is assumed that the syntactic proficiency of the students will develop in relevance with their grades--syntactic structure will become more mature as they are moving up to the higher level.

Next, a study was then conducted by analyzing the written texts that the students produce. According to O'Donnel (1968)"to measure language maturity, the instrument used should be easily administrable and scoreable and should be based on valid indices of language maturity". A number of studies on language development and syntactic maturity (Hunt, 1965; O'Donnel, 1968, 1970; Dixon, 1970; Steward,1978) have proved that Hunt's T-unit meets those criteria. Following Hunt's study (1965), there were five indicators that were intended to be investigated in this research; they were (1) mean T-unit length, (2) subordinate clause index, (3) mean clause length, (4) mean sentence length, and (5) main clause coordination index, to measure the syntactic maturity. However, it was the mean T-unit length that was used as the main measure of the syntactic maturity. This referred to the previous studies which claimed that mean T-unit length was the best or the most reliable index to measure the syntactic maturity (Hunt, 1965; O'Donnel, 1968; Dixon, 1970; and Steward, 1978 as cited by Lim Ho-Peng,1984).

Further consideration was also taken by looking into the finding of Scott and Tucker's study as quoted by Lim Ho-Peng (1984)--which proved that the subjects who demonstrated higher proficiency in English produced less errorneous

sentences; meanwhile, other studies claimed the percentage of error-free T-units as a measure that was able to discriminate levels of English proficiency (Larsen-Freeman, 1978, in Kyle, 2011) and/or determine writing quality (Perkins, 1980, in Kyle, 2011). Then Polio (1997) discussed that the ratio of error-free T-units to total words and error-counts were highly reliable measures of linguistic accuracy. That's why, this study also took into account the errors which occurred in the texts produced by the participants and used the index of erroneous T-units/total number of T-units as an additional indicator of syntactic maturity.

In line with the school's language policy which enforces the use of English as language of instruction and assessment in part or in all subjects, it is expected that the findings of this study will give valuable contribution to the development of the English courses - specifically writing courses - in bilingual schools with the possibility to be also implemented in non-bilingual schools as well. Lim Ho-Peng (1984) stated that the findings of the studies on the syntactic characteristics which were based on a body of empirical data would provide useful information for curriculum planners preparing writing courses in ESL, and for teaching methods in the ESL writing classrooms. In addition, Craig (1975) stated

that specific problem could be identified by measuring the language performance shown in the written language. He argued that the ways someone manipulates his/her written language would reveal his/her level of language performance. Thus, the difference of syntactic maturity shown in the result of this study can also be used to identify the area where improvement needs to be enhanced so that both English language performance and language competence of all students can be developed.

Following Hunt (1966, 1968), there have been quite a number of research aimed to study the development of the syntactic maturity of the students, from elementary to tertiary levels. Most of those researchers used Hunt's T-unit as the tool to measure the syntactic maturity; such as Richardson, et.al. (1976), Lim Ho-Peng (1984), Laing (1985), Yap T.H (1990), Harjanto, Ig. (1991), Johansson and Geisler (2009), and Bergman (2010) to name some. Jonsson (2010); on the other hand, analyzed the construction of the noun phrase instead of T-units to measure the syntactic maturity. Then, Chen and Zechner (www.aclweb.org/anthology/P11-1073.pdf) investigated the associations between speakers' syntactic complexity features and their speaking proficiency scores provided by human raters; Pufahl (1974) examined the

relationship among syntactic performance, writing competence, and reading comprehension of college students. Lastly, Ott (2013) investigated whether the syntactic and semantic development differed in oral versus written persuasive discourse for adolescents with typical language development. All the researches mentioned above investigated the syntactic maturity and development of either native speakers or second/foreign speakers of English. As far as it is known, there has been no research which studied the English syntactic maturity and syntactic development of bilingual students in the non-native context like Indonesia. The one that was closely related but not exactly the same was a research entitled *Syntactic Maturity in Four Different Cultural Groups* (Craig, 1975) which investigated the syntactic maturity differences of grade 11 and 12 students in Canada where English was spoken in daily communication. This aforementioned study attempted to see the differences between groups of students to whom English was their first language and those to whom English was a second language.

After reviewing the related researches and considering the phenomenon described in the earlier paragraphs of this section, the design of this research was a cross-sectional study as described in details in chapter III.

Research Question

Based on the background of this study which describes the phenomenon of bilingual secondary students in big cities in Indonesia, and considering that no research has investigated the English syntactic maturity and syntactic development of bilingual students in the non-native setting, this study attempted to find the answer for the following questions:

1. To what extent does the syntactic maturity develop across the secondary levels as shown in the English written texts produced by bilingual students of grade 7 to grade 9 in a secondary school in Surabaya?

This question was further defined into the following minor questions:

- a. How does the mean T-unit length develop across the secondary levels from grade 7 to 9?
- b. How does the subordinate clause index develop across the secondary levels from grade 7 to 9?
- c. How does the mean clause length develop across the secondary levels from grade 7 to 9?
- d. How does the mean sentence length develop across the secondary levels from grade 7 to 9?

- e. How does the mean clause coordination index develop across the secondary levels from grade 7 to 9?
 - f. Does the index of errorneous T-units/total T-units decrease from grade 7 to 9?
2. What factors might influence the differences and/or similarities in the English syntactic maturity of those bilingual students?

Purpose of the Study

Related to the formulated research questions, this study specifically aimed to firstly describe how English syntactic maturity develops across the secondary levels as shown in the written texts produced by the bilingual secondary students of grade 7 to grade 9 in Indonesia. In order to be able to describe the development of the syntactic maturity, this study attempted to find out how (1) the mean T-unit length, (2) the subordinate clause index, (3) the mean clause length, and (4) the mean sentence length developed across the secondary levels from grade 7 to 9. Additionally, it was also aimed to find out whether the mean clause coordination index and the ratio of errorneous T-units/total T-units decreased from grade 7 to 9.

Secondly, this research was also meant to find out the influencing factors which explained the differences and/or similarities of the English syntactic maturity revealed from the analysis of the texts written by the students mentioned above.

Theoretical Framework

This research was conducted based on the theory of language acquisition with the focus on the syntactic acquisition, and writing skill as well as the theory of syntactic maturity which was measured by T-unit as proposed by Hunt (1968). Besides, the theory about error analysis was used to provide insight about how to differentiate between the error-free and the erroneous T-units.

The theory of language acquisition provides fundamental insights of how the participants acquire their first and second language, and how their syntactic ability develops over the time. Then, the theory of writing explains about the criteria of an effective writing, whereas the theory of syntactic maturity discusses about the nature of syntactic maturity and how it can be measured using T-unit which is specifically illustrated to give a clear picture of the analysis technique.

Significance of the Study

The finding of this study which describes the English syntactic maturity and development of the Indonesian bilingual secondary students is expected to be used as a basis for developing the English courses - especially writing - in bilingual schools since this proficiency plays an essential role in the students' academic success besides their speaking skill.

Besides, the finding of this study may also be beneficial for the improvement of the English courses or curriculum in non-bilingual schools in Indonesia hoping that all Indonesian students might be able to compete in the global world by acquiring the necessary English proficiency.

Assumptions

In order to write an effective composition, there are some important factors to consider; they are content/ideas, purpose, audience, organization and mechanics which cover the need of fluency and accuracy (Reid, 1993; Peha, 2002; Hedge, 2008). These have to be present in all text types or genres.

Regarding the syntactic maturity, a composition is considered matured if it shows different types of syntactic

structures--ranging from the simple to the most complex ones. A sentence can be very long, but consists of too many simple sentences as a result of the use of excessive coordination; such composition cannot be considered as matured syntactically (Hunt, 1965). This also applies to different text types.

Based on the above theories, this study assumes that (1) the ability of writing a composition and (2) syntactic maturity are not influenced by the types or genres of the texts. Whatever the text types that the participants write, they will reveal similar quality of writing and syntactic maturity.

Scope and Limitation

This present study was focused on the secondary bilingual students who acquire English and Indonesian either as their first or second language. The syntactic maturity was then measured by analyzing the participants' written texts rather than their spoken utterances. Two text types were chosen to be the source of data; first the descriptive text as the main source and second the narrative texts taken from the class assessment as triangulation. The selection of these text types or genres was made based on the consideration that the two text types or genres were recognizable among grade 7-9 students

although different grade might have different levels of competence.

Further, the analysis of this study was concentrated on the syntactic structures that the subjects composed. This refers to the fact that syntax is the aspect of language which forms the bridge between the intentions and meaning that the speaker wishes to express; in other word, forms (syntax) express the understanding of the meaning (semantics) of a particular relation. (Menyuk, 1976). Consequently, no syntactic structure is produced without the understanding of the meaning intended to convey.

Stansfield (1989) states that the length of time it takes an individual to learn a language or to reach a certain degree of language competency is determined by their language aptitude. This implies that children with the same age or the same grade level might have different levels of syntactic maturity because their language aptitudes are different. Ideally, a language aptitude test should be administered so that a more accurate data of the participants' cognitive ability which might provide further explanation of the difference and/or similarity of the syntactic maturity can be revealed. Unfortunately, to find a language aptitude test instrument that is written in English is difficult if not impossible in Surabaya whereas to use the

Indonesian version instrument to measure the language aptitude of the subjects to whom English might be their first language, will possibly lead to an invalid result. Therefore, it was decided that no language aptitude test was conducted. Instead, a comparison of their academic performances in general was carried out. This might have given sufficient explanation in terms of their cognitive aspects; thus, to the findings of this research as well.

Definition of the Key-terms

Referring to the title of this study and the underlying background, the following key-terms need to be defined.

Syntactic maturity

Syntactic maturity refers to the ability to produce complex syntactic structures shown by the use of embedding and deletion transformations to express more ideas in fewer words;

T-unit

T-Unit (minimal terminable unit) as introduced by Kellogg W. Hunt (1968, p.4) is a main clause plus any subordinate clause or non-clausal structure that is attached to or embedded within it.

English written text

English written text in this study is referred to the writing composed in English.

Bilingual students

Grosjean (1988) defines bilinguals as those who are using two languages on a regular basis. Accordingly, for the purpose of this study, the term “bilingual students” is referred to the learners who are using English and Indonesian on a regular basis as their means of communication both in and outside of the school.

Thesis Organization

This thesis is organized into five chapters comprising the introduction in the first chapter, review of related literature in chapter 2, research method in chapter 3, result and discussion in chapter 4, and the conclusion and suggestion in chapter 5.

The first chapter of this thesis introduces the background that triggers the formulation of the research questions and its purposes, the theoretical framework that is underlying this study, its significance and assumption, the scope and limitation as well as the definition of the key terms.

The second chapter elaborates the historical background, and the theories based on which this study was conducted; meanwhile some previous related studies are explored to support the researcher's claim.

In chapter three, the research method is illustrated. This includes the research design, the subjects, the source of data, data and instrument, data collection and data analysis technique.

Last but not least, chapter four presents the results of this research followed by the discussions which lead to the conclusion drawing in chapter five that is then closed with suggestions for further study and the improvement of the English writing courses in Indonesia.