

COMPARING THE LEVEL OF BALINESE LANGUAGE ACQUISITION USING THE VOCABULARY LEVEL TEST

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1

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Abstract

Language acquisition is the process of gaining language naturally, which begins in the early period of life. The first language learnt by a child becomes his/her native language or mother tongue. This article focused on the language acquisition of children aged 7-9 to find out their mastery of vocabulary in Balinese language. Vocabulary mastery is the number of vocabulary in a language which contains information about its meaning, form, and usage in context of communication. It is the core component of language proficiency and provides much of the basis for how well learners use the language. The research took place in two elementary schools: one in Denpasar and the other in Tabanan. This article aimed to compare the balinese language acquisition of children in these two areas to see whether or not their level of vocabulary were very much different.

Keywords: language acquisition, balinese language, mother tongue, vocabulary level test, comparison

I. INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is one of the important aspects in teaching language, as stated by Edward et. al. (1997). Since it is an important factor in all language teaching, students must continually gain words as they learn structure and practice sound system. Therefore, it is one of the aspects of a language that the students need to master. According to Celce and Murcia (2001: 285), vocabulary learning is a central to language acquisition whether the language is first, second, or foreign. Children produce their first words around the age of 12 months to 24 months. And they steadily add their vocabulary approximately nine words a day up to age six (Clark, 2009). Thus, this research highlights the vocabulary acquisition of children aged 7-9 in their first language.

Learning vocabulary needs a process. In order to make an effective process, the learner should be in the effective condition of acquiring vocabulary mastery. Further, Thornbury (2002: 2) states that the condition should help learners to acquire a critical mass of words to use in both understanding and producing language. Moreover, it will enable them to remember word over time and be able to recall them readily. In addition, it can develop strategies for coping with gaps in word, including coping with unknown words, or unfamiliar uses of unknown words. Vocabulary plays an important role in foreign language learning. The development of rich vocabulary is important when the learners acquire a language (Nunan, 1991: 118).

By age of eighteen months or so, the average child has a vocabulary of fifty words or more. Common items, mostly nouns, include the words listed below.

People	: daddy, mommy, baby
Food/drink	: juice, milk, cookie, water, toast, apple, cake
Animals	: dog, cat, duck, horse
Clothes	: shoes, hat
Toys	: ball, blocks
Vehicles	: car, boat, truck
Other	: bottle, key, book
Properties	: Hot, all-gone, more, dirty, cold, here, there

As shown above, noun-like words make up the single largest class in the child's early vocabulary, with verb-like and adjective-like words being the next most frequent category types.

Leading scholars in vocabulary research (Nation, 1990; Meara, 1996; Laufer, 1989, 1998; Read, 1988) believe that the number of words known is one of the key factors in L2 learning, particularly in the first stages of L2 learning where students probably have only small lexicons. Unfortunately, according to Read notes, finding out how many words L2 learners know is not a straightforward issue, because when estimating learners' vocabulary size, researchers encounter conceptual and methodological problems (Read, 1988). These problems have been addressed in a number of studies, such as for instance: on defining what a word is (Bauer and Nation, 1993), what it means to know a word (Nation 1990, 2001; Meara 1996), what is the minimum vocabulary size to follow academic programmes in English as a medium of instruction (Sutarsyah, Nation and Kennedy 1994), and what is the minimum needed to understand English texts (Nation 1990; Laufer 1992, 1997; Ward 1999).

Helping children relate new words to words they already know is very important. Teaching children to use the context around a word to try to figure out word meanings can also be effective. There are two processes take place during the children's first language acquisition, such as competence and performance processes (Chaer 2009:167). Competence process is the unconscious process of grammar mastery. This process is required during the formation of performance process, which consists of comprehension process and production process (i.e. producing the previously heard sentences). Both of these processes will lead to the linguistic competence. Thus, the linguistic competence consists of the ability of comprehending and producing new phrases.

II. METHOD

This research applied explanatory mixed method which collaborated qualitative and quantitative data. There were thirty children aged 7-9 participated in this research. Fifteen of them lived in Denpasar and the rest lived in Tabanan. This research aimed to compare the level of vocabulary acquisition between children who lived in big city and those who lived in suburban area. Six sets of pictures and a tabulation were used as the instrument in collecting data. The data were then analysed by using mean analysis.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

At the beginning of this research, the children were given six set of pictures (shown below) and were asked to choose ones based on the clues read by the researcher. This instrument was adapted from Ruffel's assessment score sheets for the Picture Vocabulary Test. Firstly, the researchers introduced and explained the task to the children by giving instruction in Balinese language:

"Pilih gambar sane pas teken kruna sane jagi orahin Bapak."
(Choose the correct picture based on the words I am going to say)

Afterward, the researchers ask the children, one after another, to point to the pictures in the order on the assessment sheet (not by the numbers on each picture). The words listed on the assessment sheet were:

Set 1

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. <i>mejuk</i> (stand) | d. <i>sekolah</i> (school) |
| b. <i>punyan</i> (tree) | e. <i>ngemang</i> (give) |
| c. <i>meng</i> (cat) | f. <i>ngajeng</i> (eat) |
| d. <i>beruang</i> (bear) | |
| e. <i>melaib</i> (run) | |
| f. <i>ningalin</i> (see) | |

Set 2

- kotak* (box)
- becik* (good)
- cenik* (little)
- yeh* (water)
- bunga* (garden)
- tengai* (day)

Set 3

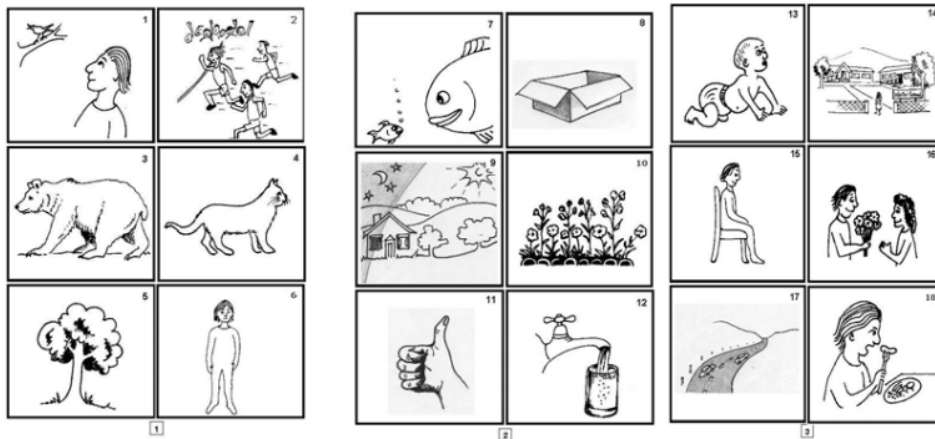
- jalan* (road)
- negak* (sit)
- bayi* (baby)

Set 4

- makeber* (fly)
- mareren* (stop)
- bapa* (father)
- cangkir* (cup)
- andus* (fire)
- nak muani* (boy)

Set 5

- kelihan* (older)
- mejalan* (walk)
- janguak* (catch)
- anyar* (new)
- kebus* (hot)
- ajengan* (food)





The findings show that there are slightly different answers between the city children (presented in Group A) and the suburban children (Group B). The data in table 1 can be resumed, e.g. For question no.1, there are 15 children in Group A who answers correctly, while there are only 14 children in Group B who give correct answer.

Table 1. Numbers of Correct Answers by the City Children and The Suburban Children

Question Number	Group A	Group B
1	15	14
2	13	13
3	14	15
4	10	14
5	14	15
6	15	13
7	15	15
8	12	15
9	15	15
10	15	14
11	15	15
12	13	15
13	15	13
14	14	15
15	12	15
16	15	14
17	14	12
18	15	15
19	15	15

20	13	14
21	14	14
22	15	15
23	10	15
24	12	14
25	12	12
26	14	10
27	8	9
28	9	13
29	10	15
30	12	14
Total	87%	93%

In total, the level of vocabulary acquisition of Group A is 87%, while the level of vocabulary acquisition of group B is 93%. It means that the suburban children have higher level of vocabulary mastery. This is a prove that the modern lifestyle in big cities has influenced the local language acquisition. Children in big cities tend to speak Indonesian language with their parents and friends, for the sake of prestige and social status. For this reasons, children in big cities are lacking input in their local language. Meanwhile, the children in the suburban area or in villages keep speaking local languages with their parents and friends, both at home and at school.

IV. ² CONCLUSION

From the previous discussion, it is good to know that the level of Balinese vocabulary acquisition of children aged 7-9 is above average. However, the facts that the children in big city (Denpasar) have lower level of vocabulary mastery has to be the point of consideration. This research can simply be an overview for further studies to find a solution to improve the level of Balinese vocabulary mastery for children in big cities.

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