

## CREATING STORY: HOW YOUNG CHILDREN USE INDONESIAN COHESIVE DEVICES

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### ABSTRACT

*At very young age, children are able to convey a story or event chronologically. They are also able to produce some kinds of cohesive devices when they are creating story. Indonesian children apparently are no exception. The most prominent aspect is the grammatical cohesive device, especially conjunctions. In this paper we analyse the use of conjunction in Indonesian-speaking children's narrative production. We address two questions: 1) how do they use conjunction in narrative; and 2) what kind of conjunctions do they use while telling story? This study involved 4 to 6 years old kindergarteners from middle-class families who live in Jakarta and Bogor. We use elicited production task with a wordless picture story book as the instrument in order to obtain children's speech production. The children are asked to create story based on the instrument. Data in this study is children's narrative speech especially the story based on the story book, and are analyzed statistically on the frequencies and correlations. The result shows that many of young children are able to use conjunction appropriately in simple sentences while they are telling story. Temporal conjunction is the most frequently used, while the adversative conjunction has the lowest usage in the children's speech.*

Keywords: *Grammatical Cohsive Device, Narrative Speech, Conjunction, Young Children*

### INTRODUCTION

Children's narrative ability is already noticeable at preschool ages (3—6 years old). At this age, children are capable to produce simple sentences, and some are even able to use complex, multiple sentences with conjunction. The capability is affected by interactions with their parents or their peer (Papalia and Martorell, 20xx:221). In other words, preschoolers (nickname for children entering preschool age) are considered capable in producing narrative speech.

Children's ability in telling stories can be assessed in how they compose words into comprehensible and coherent sentences, which then form an intact story. A coherent story can be created with the use of cohesive devices. Halliday and Hasan (1976) classified the cohesive devices into five types of cohesion (as cited in Renkema 2004:103-15), namely reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion. Lexical cohesive devices may take a form as repetition, synonymy, hyponymy, metonymy, and antonymy. Like other aspects of linguistics, the use of cohesive devices becomes interesting when it is associated with child's language skills. According to Colozzo (2014), grammatical cohesive devices began to appear in five and six years old children's speech. This is in line with Papalia and Martorell (20xx) in that children at preschool ages are already familiar with conjunction (which is one of grammatical cohesive devices).

Conjunctions are used to connect linguistic entities of syntactic function and are classified as abstract relational meaning. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), there are four types of conjunction that are classified on grammatical devices, namely temporal conjunction, additive conjunction, causal conjunction, and adversative conjunction. As we mentioned previously, children are able to use coordinative sentences and later, subordinating. Three years old children are already familiar with the use of additive conjunctions, expressing temporal and causal relations, showing that they are already capable to use the syntactical rules (Gloria *et al.* 2016). Other scholar (Befi Lopes 2008, in Gloria *et al.* 2016:222) believes that starting from 3 years old, children use more connective expressing spatial coherence of time sequence and most of the connectivity markers, such as conjunctions, which are used initially.

In Indonesia, there are still a few research done on the use of grammatical cohesion device in children's narrative speech, especially those focusing on conjunctions. Thus, this study intends to evaluate children's ability to use conjunction in their narrative speech. The main question to be addressed in this study is: how do Indonesian-speaking children use conjunctions in their narrative production? This leads to another question: what kind of conjunction they use when they are telling story?

The participants in this study are children aged 4 to 6 years old (N=28) who are attending a kindergartens in Jakarta and Bogor. The focus of this study is on the use of conjunction in the children's narrative production. To study the use of conjunction among the preschoolers, the research utilizes elicited production task.

This paper is part of the first author's (Ferhadija 2017) bachelor thesis under the supervision of the second author. Other sections in the paper cover theoretical reviews that are related to language development of preschoolers, followed by discussion on cohesive devices, research method, and the analysis. The last part of the paper contains the conclusion and a number of findings that could be explored further in the future studies.

## METHOD

The aim of this research is to examine preschoolers' use of conjunction in their narrative production. Therefore, an appropriate method is needed to obtain the data effectively. This study specifically used elicited production task (EPT) to obtain children's narrative production. Elicited Production Task (EPT) is an experiment technique used to elicit certain language elements. EPT has been used many times in child language research; it is also widely used to assess children language development. The technique has also been effective when applied to children aged three years old or older (Crain and Thornton, 2000:145). This technique is supported by instrument.

### a. Instrument

To collect the data, we used two kinds of instrument, namely wordless picture story book and parental questionnaires. The main instrument is a wordless picture story book to elicit children speech production. The parental questionnaires are used in order to have information on children's socio-cultural background, especially on the language use.

We conducted a pilot test using a similar book with a different plot and story. The pilot test was conducted to a group of four-year-old children in a playgroup. The pilot test revealed that the children still find it difficult to focus on researchers' questions; thus, we did not get the best result. Based on the finding in the pilot test, we prepared a scenario as a guideline when conducting the interview with the children. It helps children to be more attentive and enabling them to produce the narratives.

The instrument we use to elicit children's production is a wordless picture story book entitled *Makan Rame-Rame* 'Let's Eat Together' by Watik Ideo. The book consists of eight pages of picture illustrating flock of birds who are about to have a feast. Below are the pictures from the book.



Table I. A series of pictures from the storybook *Makan Rame-Rame* 'Let's Eat Together'

### b. Procedure

Data on children's narrative productions were collected at school. The school allowed us to collect data when the children were participating in classroom activities. On the day of the data collection, we conducted individual interview with the children. We approached the child by playing a game together and engaged in a light chat. As children became more relaxed, we showed them the picture storybook. We asked the child to narrate the pictures they saw in the book. We also asked a number of questions that are related to the content of the book. The purpose is to familiarize the child with the content of the book, thus allowing her/him to produce a more coherent narrative. The questions were prepared beforehand along with scenario. Subsequently the child was asked to narrate the pictures without any intervention from the researchers. The recording started as the child began to narrate the pictures. It ended as the child finished her/his narration. When the session was over, the interviewer gave the child a token of appreciation. All the children in this study managed to narrate the pictures until the end.

### c. Data Processing

We have two kinds of data: children demographic information (obtained from the parental questionnaires), and children's narrative productions. The two data were processed separately. Of the

twenty-eight questionnaires distributed, 21 of them were returned. From the data, we obtained a factual picture of the children, i.e. about their gender, their date and place of birth, the birth order, the language used at home, at school, and in their neighborhood, parents' occupation, parents' ethnicity, and the ethnicity of the caregivers (if any), and the parents' and caregivers' languages.

Meanwhile, the recordings of the children's narrative production were transcribed into orthographic transcription. They were codified according to gender, and classified in accordance with the number of utterances and the types of grammatical cohesive devices in the narratives. The data were then entered into SPSS matrix to be processed statistically.

## ANALYSIS

This section briefly describes the use of conjunction in preschoolers' narrative speech. The results of the analyses are presented in graph and tables. The Figure 1 illustrates the individual use on conjunction in the narrative production. The numbers indicates the mean of ratio.

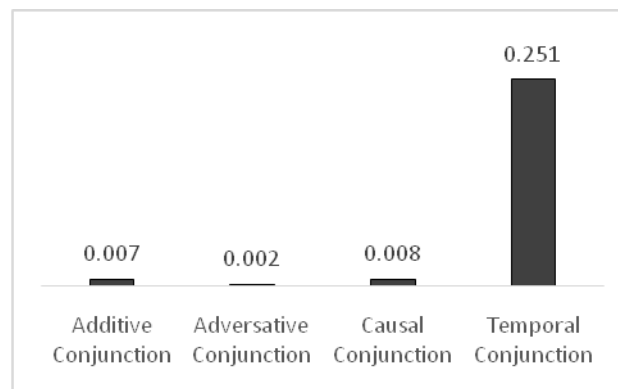


Figure 1. Comparison of conjunction usage in preschoolers' narrative speech (mean ratio)

Figure 1 shows that the most prominent thing is the great difference in the mean score of temporal conjunction to be compared with other types of conjunction. It is shown that temporal conjunction has the highest score in preschoolers' narrative speech. The following table shows the comparison of average usage of conjunction in children's narrative production.

TABLE I. The Use of Conjunction by Age

Age	Mean	Standard Deviation
4	0,200	0,19
5	0.303	0.21
6	0.302	0.20

Table I shows that the use of conjunction tend to increase with age. This is because within the language development, children's vocabulary are increasing. The table also shows that the value of standard deviation for each group is smaller than the mean value: 4-year-old group (M=0.20, SD=0.19); 5-year-old group (M=0.30, SD=0.21); and 6-year-old group (M=0.30, SD=0.20). Therefore, it can be concluded that the ability to produce sentences is evenly distributed among the members of the groups.

TABLE II. The Use of Additive Conjunction by Age

Age	Mean	Standard Deviation
4	---	---
5	0.013	0.045
6	0.09	0.032

It is shown in Table II that additive conjunction was found only a few. The use the conjunction only appeared in the group of 5 and 6 years old. The table indicates that the children's ability in using additive conjunction is unequal; only a few children are capable to use this kind of cohesive devices. The occurrence of this conjunction is marked by the word *dan* 'and', as in the example (1).

- (1) *Lalu anaknya digendong dan sama mamahnya. Kakaknya dan kakak satu lagi*  
 'Then the child was carried and with its mother. Its brother and the other brother'

TABLE III. The Use of Adversative Conjunction by Age

Age	Mean	Standard Deviation
4	---	---
5	---	---
6	0.004	0.016

As with additive conjunction, the use of adversative is also rarely found in children's production. In fact, the cohesive device only appears in the oldest children with a very low value. The kind of instrument, which is a simple story, may be the reason behind the finding, thus the participants was not triggered to make contradictory sentences. Other than that, the table indicates that, like additive conjunction, the ability in using adversative conjunction is unequal. Adversative conjunction is used to state two contradictory ideas. The appearance of this conjunction is marked by the word *tapi* 'but', as in the example (2).

- (2) *Ayo...nyabut-nyabut rumput. Ternyata bukannya rumput, tapi lagi nyabut rambut (RP\_05)*  
 'Let's pull the grass...It was not grass, but was pulling hair instead' (RP\_05)

TABLE IV. The Use of Causal Conjunction by Age

Age	Mean	Standard Deviation
4	0,090	0,021
5	0.016	0.041
6	---	---

Table IV shows a rather interesting fact, to be compared with the two previous data. We can see that causal conjunction only appear at the group of 4 and 5 years old, but not in 6 years old. Consider the example sentences below.

- (3) *Ibunya memarah karena anaknya terbang*  
 'The mother was angry because her child flew'  
 (4) *Ini dia lagi mematuk karena dia lapar.*  
 'Here it was pecking because it was hungry

Examples (3) and (4) above are produced by 4- and 5 years old children. If we look closer towards the wordless pictures (as shown in section of method), we can see that both sentences with causal conjunctions above contain ideas that are not explicitly reflected on the story. In other words, they use their imagination to add scenes in the story. On the other hand, this is not found in the 6-year-old children's speech. We found that the 6-year-olds tend to tell only what is explicitly visible on the pictures, without adding imagination to their story.

TABLE V. The Use of Temporal Conjunction by Age

Age	Mean	Standard Deviation
4	0.18	0.19
5	0.27	0.22
6	0.28	0.21

Table VI indicates that the use of temporal conjunction has the highest score compared to the other three conjunctions. This is most likely caused by the instrument, which triggers children to produce chronological sequences of sentences. It also indirectly leads them to use temporal conjunctions in their speech. Besides, it is indicated that the use of temporal conjunction improved as the children getting older. The small gap among the age groups indicates that the tendency to use this kind of conjunction does not vary by much. The use of temporal conjunction is mostly represented by word *terus* 'then', as outlined at the example (5).

- (5) *Ada burung. Terus burungnya cari makan. Terus burungnya ada lagi. Terus dapet makanan (RL\_12)*  
 'There is a bird. Then, the bird then goes out to find some food. Then, there was another bird. Then, got some food.' (RL 12)

## CONCLUSION

We can conclude that preschoolers in our study are already familiar with the four types of conjunctions, i.e. additive conjunction, adversative conjunction, causal conjunction, and temporal conjunction. Of the four types of conjunction, temporal conjunction which represented by the word *terus* 'then' is the most frequently used in children's narrative speech. The finding is strongly influenced by the instruments in this study. The plot triggers participants to tell events chronologically, thus indirectly lead them using temporal conjunctions. The finding also indicates that these children are already capable to tell story chronologically. On the other hand, adversative conjunction has the lowest usage in the children's speech. As we already mentioned previously, this is most likely to occur because the plot of the story in the instrument does not contain conflicts that not trigger the children to make complex and contradictive sentences.

The results also reaffirm theories that in preschool ages, children are already capable in making simple compound sentences using conjunction. Still and all, from this kind of method and data, we can still explore further the use of other types of cohesion devices, such as lexical cohesion. Besides, it may be necessary to carry out a further study using different methods and instrument in order to obtain overall result on child language development, especially in narrative production. The number of participants may also have an effect to the result. Thus, research with a larger and more diverse number of participants is strongly recommended.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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