

STUDENTS' SENTENCE COMPLEXITY IN ENGLISH WRITING IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIL BILINGUAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract: This study explored the students' sentence complexity in English writing by analyzing their skills in producing complex sentences. The context of this study was a CLIL bilingual primary education where the students acquire the language through some subjects such as Science and Math. The data were collected from the writings from fifty primary six students on the topic of a personal diary. The documents were analyzed to determine the number of sentences, the number of complex sentences, and the percentage of complex sentences relative to other sentence types. Using Pearson product-moment correlation, the relationship between the number of sentences and the number of complex sentences was analyzed. The result revealed that twenty out of fifty students had a higher proportion of complex sentences and only one student did not produce complex sentences. It concluded that the CLIL approach had been successfully given input and exposure to Indonesian bilingual primary education students as the students' sentence complexity was high. In addition, there was a substantial relationship between the number of sentences produced by students and the number of complex sentences. It demonstrated that if the number of sentences written by students was high, thereby was the number of complex sentences they produced. This result can be a consideration for teachers to use the CLIL approach in promoting English to primary students.

Keywords: CLIL, primary education, second language acquisition, sentence complexity

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, when I was teaching Primary six students in an Islamic Bilingual School in Surabaya about writing a monologue speech script, I was surprised that they had been able to write a long text in English with very complex ideas and sentences. When I asked their English teacher, she said that they have learned to write sentences since primary one. As bilingual education students, they use English as their language at school. They also learn other subjects such as Science and Math in English. As I inquired further, I discovered that the students are taught using a CLIL (Content Language Integrated Learning) approach. The goal is to prepare them for the Cambridge checkpoint test at the end of the semester. The students must compose a paragraph on a topic given from the test. Hence, the teacher always gives them practice to write sentences and paragraphs from the beginning. Therefore, it is not surprising that they had been able to write a good paragraph.

In contrast, many Indonesian students still have difficulty in writing (Rahmatunisa, 2014; Cahyono & Mukminatien, 2016; Toba et al., 2019). One of the reasons is that writing requires knowledge of numerous components, including the topic, structure, language use, vocabulary, and mechanics (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). According to writing experts, there are five parts of writing that each contributes in a distinct way. According to Hartfiel et al. (1985), there were four significant elements in writing including "content", "language use", "organization", "vocabulary", and "mechanics" with percentages of 30%; 25%; 20%, and 5%.

Therefore, in order to write effectively, students must have well-understanding of the topics of content, use accurate grammar rules, organize their thoughts coherently, use a variety of appropriate diction, and pay attention to mechanical details like punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and paragraphing. As grammar is one of the five components that make up overall writing competence, therefore, the researcher exerts an attempt to evaluate the students' writing ability which includes language use skills, particularly their ability to construct complex sentences.

This school uses content language integrated learning (CLIL), in which students learn English through the course materials. Coyle et al (2010) defined CLIL as an educational method that employs a second/foreign language to teach and acquire content and language. The key principle of CLIL is applying language as a tool for learning. CLIL has been highlighted and put into practice in Europe as an effective teaching and learning method that takes a substantial impact on the Union's language acquisition (European Commission, 2003). For many years, CLIL has been created and integrated into bilingual education throughout Europe, where it is regarded as a successful method of both teaching and learning (Nikula, 2017). In Indonesia, there exist certain educational institutions known as Indonesian Plus Institutions, which are privately operated bilingual schools providing teaching in both Bahasa Indonesia and English (Setyaningrum & Purwati, 2020). According to Deswila et al., (2020), CLIL is a successful strategy for encouraging students in bilingual classrooms to use and learn the English language.

Various studies have assessed the efficacy of CLIL. Nikula (2017) has observed that CLIL students are more sensitive to syntactical complexity and text organization. According to Dalton-Puffer (2011), writing is the most skill that received attention. Likewise, Kusmayadi & Suryana (2017) discovered that CLIL is successful at enhancing students' writing abilities. Jexenflucker and Dalton-Puffer (2010) conducted a study explored how CLIL affected several facets of written language proficiency. The purpose was to identify the areas that are most positively influenced by subject matter teaching in a foreign language and those that remain unaffected. They point out the result that CLIL students consistently demonstrate significant advantages in lexico-grammar, as well as in vocabulary variety and orthographic correctness. According to Ruiz de Zarobe (2010), learners in CLIL programs exhibit a wider range of morphosyntactic and lexical resources, enabling them to generate more complex and sophisticated linguistic constructions. The students exhibit excellent accuracy in their spelling as well as their use of tense and inflectional affixes. Collectively, these studies outline a critical role for the benefits of CLIL on students' writing, especially in students' sentence complexity.

Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) defined complexity as the degree of complex language that learners produce. There are two categories that make language become elaborated. First, a language is described as complex if it is at the top of its interlanguage system and is not totally automated. L2 beginners tend to use simple language because they do not master the language well while L2 learners who have mastered the language well tend to use more complex sentences. Secondly, complexity referred to the ability of learners to use a variety of distinct structures. The fundamental constituents of a sentence consist of a cluster of words consisting of noun phrase (NP) serving as the subject and a verb phrase (VP) which serves as the predicate. In other words, Radford (1997) mentioned that sentence is a "string of words" that commences with a capital letter and ends with a word with a full stop.

Complex sentences are categorized syntactically into two groups of coordinate structure and embedded structure (Folse, Solomon & Muchmore-Vokoun, 2009). The embedded structure is used when a dependent sentence is embedded with an independent clause. A complex sentence's embedded structure includes adjective clauses, noun clauses, and adverbial clauses. A coordinate structure is comprised of two clauses that are linked by a subordinate clause. These syntactically complex sentences are essential for producing high-

quality writing since they necessitate expertise in the production of complicated and varied sentence patterns (Jagaiah et al., 2020). The inability to create syntactically complex sentences may inhibit the student's ability to express their ideas in high-quality writing (Graham, 2006). Bram (1995) mentioned that writing with accurate grammar sentences is not enough. Students need to express their ideas in complex sentences to improve the flow of thoughts and express their ideas smoothly. When employing complex sentences, students have the ability to accentuate significant concepts within independent clauses while relegating less significant ideas to dependent clauses. Therefore, it's crucial for students to master complex sentences in order to sharpen their writing abilities.

The theoretical basis of this work encompasses various concepts, namely writing competence, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), grammatical competence, and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories. In the CLIL context, learners acquire grammatical patterns through their acquisition in learning the contents. The students subconsciously acquire the target language both oral and written communication. This is in accordance with Mehisto et al. (2008), who stated that CLIL gives young students with more authentic and typical instances to acquire and practice a second language, thereby enabling them to do so unconsciously while learning the topic. According to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories, learners' capacity to construct complex sentences serves as a sign of their writing maturity (Krashen, 1981). In the theory of SLA, L2 students internalize grammatical principles in one of two ways: either through acquisition or learning. Acquisition occurs in untaught situations where L2 learners are exposed to an understandable natural language input (Krashen, 1981) while learning occurs through form-focused instructions that provide learners with the acquisition of compatible grammar (Ellis, 1997). Teachers must create appropriate strategies, materials, and evaluations for their students to support the two processes of learning L2 rule systems (acquisition and learning). The acquisition of language is facilitated by exposure to a variety of sources, which includes subject-specific reading materials that adhere to proper grammar (Cahyono et al., 2016). In a corresponding way, Paradis and Jia (2016) mentioned that input and cognitive issues affected how well children learning English as a second language picked up vocabulary, morphology, and morphosyntax. Additionally, the number and qualities of L2 input and output that young learners receive have an impact on their capacity to learn L2 morphology (Armon-Lotem et al., 2011). Therefore, exposure and input that the students receive play a significant role in their second language acquisition.

Even though CLIL gives significant impacts on the student's writing skills, most previous studies are conducted in secondary to higher education where they have acquired their first language. CLIL is typically used in secondary education, where students have mastered their L1 literacy skills (Dalton-Puffer (2011). Even though there have been some studies on CLIL with pre-secondary learners, however, it is in the European context. Anderson (2015) highlighted the general lack of CLIL studies on young learners in worldwide. Setyaningrum & Purwati (2020) suggested that CLIL should be implemented to teach young learners at primary schools because the principles of CLIL had the same characteristics as the nature of English for young learners learning. Interestingly, one bilingual primary school in Surabaya has already implemented the CLIL approach since the first grade. As Nikula (2017) stated that CLIL learners displayed sensitivity to syntactic complexity and text structuring. Moreover, EFL students must possess strong subject-matter knowledge, write about the topics using precise grammar rules, organize their ideas coherently, use a variety of appropriate dictions, and pay attention to mechanical details like punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and paragraphing in order to be proficient writers (Cahyono et al., 2016).

Therefore, this researcher attempts to find out the students' language complexity by analyzing their proficiency in utilizing complex sentence structures by examining the proportion

of complex sentences and the connection between the number of sentences and complex sentences produced by students. The results of this study would provide information for teachers about the student's ability in using complex sentences as it is an essential aspect in writing in the context of CLIL bilingual education. Additionally, teachers are also able to utilize this study's result to design some appropriate activities for areas needed and to focus on the role of language acquisition in learning English. This study also can be a consideration for other teachers or schools to implement CLIL as their teaching approach to improve the student's English writing ability. As Anderson (2015) suggested that this study would give more information about how CLIL can be used with young learners.

METHOD

This descriptive quantitative study was conducted in a primary six class of a bilingual education school in Surabaya consisting of 50 students. Descriptive document analysis was used in this study to analyze the students' writing specifically their complex sentences. The students learned writing under these frameworks: 1) Use a variety of simple, compound, and complex sentences chosen for effect; 2) Develop writing of a range of text types for a specified audience, using appropriate content and language; 3) Identify the main clause and other clauses (subordinate clauses) in a complex sentence. Document analysis was used in this study to analyze a phenomenon within its context which enabled researchers to collect natural and authentic data (Ary et al., 2002). The documents were collected from the students' writing assignments which topic is a personal diary.

Adapted from Cahyono et al., (2016), the following techniques were used to analyze the students' writing. The first step in this process was to count how many sentences and complicated sentences each student had written. We looked at the embedded structure (in the form of an embedded clause) and the coordinate structure (using a subordinate conjunction) to figure out how to classify the complex sentences. The formula described above was employed to compute the ratio of complex sentences to the overall count of sentences provided by students:

$$\text{Proportion of complex sentences} = \frac{\text{total number of complex sentences}}{\text{total number of sentences}} \times 100\%$$

The relationship of the total number of sentences and the quantity of complex sentence was measured utilizing the statistical program SPSS 26. In order to ascertain the relationship among the quantity of sentences and the quantity of complex sentences, the researcher employed the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test to assess the normalcy assumption. The relationship amid the number of sentences and the number of complex sentences was determined using Pearson product-moment correlation analysis after the data were distributed normally. Finally, the researcher reported the data in a form of a description.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned in the literature review, writing in complex sentences are important to help students deliver their ideas smoothly (Bram, 1995) Hence, the initial aim of this research was to assess students' skill in employing complex sentence structures and examine the potential relationship between the quantity of sentences and the quantity of complex phrases utilized in written compositions.

This study's initial objective was to determine student's proficiency in complex sentences by examining the proportion percentage of complex sentences that they used when writing a personal diary. The result was shown in the table below:

Table 1. The proportion of complex sentences

Number of total sentences	661
Number of complex sentences	153
The proportion of complex sentences	23,14%

The total amount of simple sentences detected in the writing of 50 students was 661, with an average of 13.22, whereas the average number of the complex sentences was 3.06 from 153 total sentences. This meant that the average proportion of complex sentences was 23.14%. It explained that the students had produced 23% of complex sentences in their writing. These results corroborate the findings of a great deal of the previous work by Nikula (2017) who discovered that CLIL students are more sensitive to syntactical complexity and Ruiz de Zarobe (2010) who argued that students in CLIL programs demonstrated a greater range of morphosyntactic and lexical resources, which they utilized to construct more intricate and sophisticated linguistic structures. This was an interesting finding where Indonesian primary students had been able to use complex sentences when writing as in most previous studies on CLIL impacts done for secondary to higher education students (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Nikula, 2017; Rong & Nair, 2021). In comparison to the mainstream students' writing ability, most Indonesian primary students were still in the process of writing simple sentences and compound sentences as Putrayasa et al (2018) found that primary school students used simple and compound sentences in writing essays. Interestingly, the finding revealed that of 50 students only 1 student who did not use complex sentences in her/his writing. The student only wrote one compound sentence in her/his. Below were the lists of the five highest proportion percentage of complex sentences:

Table 2. The fifth-highest proportion percentages of complex sentences

Students	Number of complex sentences	Total sentences	Proportion Percentage
S41	8	10	80
S50	3	5	60
S06	7	12	58,3
S12	4	7	57,14
S35	3	6	50

The number of complex sentences was found at its highest at 80. It concluded that there were a lot of complex sentences used. From the data analyzed, there were 155 complex sentences found in students' writing. They wrote a correct independent clause with a dependent clause connected by a subordinate conjunction. There were various subordinate conjunctions that the student used, for example, **when, because, if, so, since, while, after, before, until, and as**. The most subordinate conjunctions used were **because** (to show a cause-effect relationship) and **when** (to show a relation of two clauses including a transition of time). Interestingly, the primary six students also used subordinate conjunctions such as **"since"** and **"as"** to refer to **"because"**. Following were the examples:

1. I was happy **since** we were going to celebrate it at night in the restaurant.
2. Fourth, it was a complete struggle **as** he needed to chase off an automated parkour.

In addition, CLIL had been successful to give input and exposure to students' learning of writing. Paradis and Jia (2016) showed that the development of English morphology, morphosyntax, and vocabulary in children attaining English as a second language seems to be influenced by aspects related to input and cognition. In the theory of SLA, the students internalized the complex sentences in two ways. First, it was based on their acquisition. By using the CLIL approach, students were able to acquire complex sentences in untaught situations

where the learning environment was cognitively demanding and linguistically accessible in both language and content learning (Coyle et al., 2010). Second, it was through the learning process. In the CLIL classroom, the student's learning occurred through form-focused instructions that provided learners with the acquisition of compatible grammar (Ellis, 1997). The student's ability to produce intricate sentences was impacted by input and exposure received through the deployment of CLIL in the classroom.

The second inquiry in this research aimed to determine the relationship of the quantity of sentences and the complex sentences in writing. In order to ascertain whether the data met the normality assumption, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was generated. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that both the number of sentences and the number of complex sentences had p values that were greater than the thresholds of the significance .05 (p-value: .012 > .05). This demonstrated that both the number of simple and complex sentences in the student's writing was distributed equally. The analysis of the association between the number of sentences and the number of complex sentences was conducted using the SPSS 26 program. The data utilized in this study fulfilled the normality requirements.

Table 3. The Correlation Analysis between the Number of Sentences and the Number of Complex Sentences

Correlations			
		Number of Sentences	Complex Sentences
Number of Sentences	Pearson Correlation	1	.448**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	50	50
Complex Sentences	Pearson Correlation	.448**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	50	50
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)			

A favourable relationship between word count and the proportion of complex sentences was found. The p-value associated with the correlation coefficient was 0.001. The observed results indicate a noteworthy association between the quantity of sentences and the quantity of complex sentences, as evidenced by the p-value falling below the predetermined level of significance of 0.05. The coefficient correlation was categorized moderate (.448) as the coefficient correlation was about .4 to .6 (Salkind, 2000). According to Cahyono et al. (2016), if students produced a lot of sentences, they also tended to produce a lot of complex sentences. The results of this study came to the same conclusion that if students wrote a lot of sentences, they also tended to produce a lot of complex sentences. According to Hartfiel et al. (1985), five essential components in writing should be considered when writing, with language use accounting for 25% of the total components. It can be deduced that the use of language had a substantial influence in the construction of the student's written work. The students were already able to write complex sentences. Moreover, almost all the students used complex sentences in their writing. They also were able to use the correct complex sentence pattern with various subordinate conjunctions. However, in order to expand the quality of the students' writing, it was necessary to raise the level of the students' complex sentences to an intermediate level because the number of sentences also affected the quantity of complex sentences.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the current study was to determine the students' sentence complexity by analyzing their ability in utilizing complex sentences. The outcomes of this investigation showed that using complex sentences was important in order to have high-quality writing. Interestingly, the primary six students of CLIL bilingual school had already able to use complex sentences when writing even though the number of complex sentences that the students used was limited. It indicated that the primary six students who experienced getting the CLIL approach had been able to utilize complex sentences when writing. The present evidence emphasizes the significance of exposure and input in second language acquisition, enabling students to absorb the language and internalize grammatical aspects in their writing. The importance of language use in writing necessitates greater emphasis, as it has a discernible impact on the overall quality of written work. This is evident from a moderate correlation seen between the number of sentences and the quantity of complex sentences. EFL primary teachers were recommended to give much exposure and input to the students according to the complex sentence. Efforts were deemed required in order to enhance the students' comprehension of the significance of complex sentences, which may be achieved by direct instruction or feedback. As this study was constrained by the absence of comprehensive data regarding the variables influencing students' proficiency in utilizing complex sentence structures, the researcher suggested the future researcher to investigate more on the correlation between input on students' second language acquisition and their ability in complex sentences.

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