

Examination of Metasyntactic Ability to French Grammar Competence Among Indonesian Students

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ABSTRACT

The competence to consciously control and utilize a better understanding of language organization helps the language users produce grammatically correct sentences and comprehend a syntactic aspect in a formal language structure, which helps the student learn, use, and understand the language fluently. Metasyntactic ability involves a mental process to reflect and manipulate the syntactic aspect of language consciously. In contrast, French grammar learning is still problematic among most Indonesian students. This study aims to gather initial data concerning the Indonesian French learner's metasyntactic ability, which is crucial to support French teachers and researchers in effectively creating innovation to develop foreign language education. The present study attempts to measure the learning results of the French students and their metasyntactic ability to French grammar competence. A cross-sectional study carried out twelve students (from various levels of proficiency) are given metasyntactic, replication of incorrect sentences, syntactic preferences, and word order tasks. Ultimately, the two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) results showed that metasyntactic ability (MSA) is not varied among students. On the other hand, as a group, they showed a significant difference in MSA based on their language proficiency levels but held insignificant differences for their grammatical preferences. The findings from multiple regressions also revealed that syntactic ability accounted for students' MSA and correlated with their grammatical preferences. This fact explains that each variable's aspect, including MSA, is not always varied regarding language proficiency.

Keywords: *French, grammar competence, learner, metasyntactic ability*

1. INTRODUCTION

Gombert has referred to the competence of metasyntactic, which cannot be naturally produced. It needs to be developed from a learning task of language structure, a definitive study of grammatical rules, and a relevant practice to stimulate a metasyntactic tendency (Gombert, 1992). The metasyntactic awareness exists when the users utilize their abilities to control the language organization and structure. Metasyntactic ability is triggered when an individual actively masters a structure aspect of language in a mental operation. This ability can be measured through relevant tests (Tunmer, Herriman, & Nesdale, 1988). Metasyntactic develops a person's ability to consciously reason and control the syntax in a language utilization and reflection to intentionally handle their method and linguistic process (Gombert, 2003).

Moreover, the metasyntactic ability plays an essential role in a high-level process of L2 reading competence.

Some also found that this ability had a relation and a significant contribution for both native and non-native on their reading ability (Lefrançois & Armand, 2003; Simard, Fortier, & Foucambert, 2013; Simard, Foucambert, & Labelle, 2014).

L2 acquisition implicates a particular language aspect to articulate a correct design of structure movement to establish the main goal in making a general conclusion. It means that learners adopt a metasyntactic strategy to discover, exercise, evaluate and control their syntactic preferences. This strategy is carried out through a significant fundamental to precisely and consciously conduct words orders in phrases, arrange whole phrases, and construct an exact measure to consciously initiate a syntactic process (Milner, 1982; Reder, Marec-Breton, Gombert, & Demont, 2013; Simard, Labelle, & Bergeron, 2017). This mental practice elaborate memorization procedure, which engages a metasyntactic tendency to value an auto-evaluation in establishing control of grammatical structure and achieving an

automatic grammatical system which has been provoked by a system of memorization; it involves an exercise to produce the language, understanding of phrases which concentrate on the syntactic aspect, completion of phrase structure, and consideration in syntactic competence to engage and decide a grammatical role. The strategy includes a prescriptive and stylistic grammatical activity to make a good order of words in a phrase, extract a structural map in interaction with syntactic, semantic, and visual factors to model learning which presents a context and phrase formula to discover a syntactic key (Gombert, 1990; Foucambert, 2009; Saint-Aubin & Klein, 2001; Koriat & Greenberg, 1996).

Adaptation of metasyntactic learning strategy comprises of an activity to discover, practice, evaluate, and control some syntactic preferences through a fundamental arrangement of phrases. It operates a grammatical ability to precisely arranging words in phrases to construct explicit conscious conduct of the syntactic process (Simard, Labelle, & Bergeron, *Measuring Metasyntactic Abilities: On a Classification of Metasyntactic Tasks*, 2017). In consequence, it seems that this ability has a connection with reading and literacy capacity because literacy pedagogy has been proven to increase metasyntactic capacities to encode, comprehend, and explain the structures of oral languages (Nocus & Gombert, 1997). In other words, an encouragement to do a lot of reading activities as to respecting syntactic signs in every word and phrase is important to establish an organized language structure which is started from the exercise of grammatical knowledge and capacity to understand a syntactic map to manipulate and make clear formal structures of the languages (Ziarko, Gagnon, Mélançon, & Morin, 2000).

In fact, metasyntactic demands consideration to a memorization system and an exercise to increase competence to apply the language in an actual situation to stimulate a linguistic production that concentrates on a crucial mental development. Thus, it will create a grammatical knowledge and systematics of formal phrases including the subject, verb, auxiliary verb, noun, pronoun, etc. (Ellis, 1994; Green & Hecht, 1993; Roehr, 2008; Cain, 2007; Elder & Manwaring, 2004; Rey-Debove, 1978).

Previous research has shown the particular contribution of metasyntactic ability to French reading skills among native and non-native speakers (Simard, Foucambert, & Labelle, 2014). The acquisition of French morphosyntax and structures by Indonesian students learning French was also conducted to argue about students' mastery of language structures (Mutiarisih et al., 2020).

Finally, there is a clear gap for studies on metasyntactic contributions to help learner benefice learning processes. This study discovers the meta-

syntactic ability of Indonesian students learning French and its contribution to French grammar skills.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the past, grammar-translation learning was ineffective because students were able to understand the structure of the language but could not communicate well in the communicative language context, "grammar instruction by itself, out of context, detached from the uses of language in meaningful situations, would be roughly equivalent to instruction totally devoid of grammar (Germain & Seguin, 1998)". In fact, cognitive ability is essential in building foundational language competence. However, students also need a strategy to manage and utilize acquired knowledge to control their cognitive or metacognitive awareness, which is beneficial to their social/emotional awareness. However, it is essential to recognize that it is not the only skill learners need to acquire. Knowing a language is not only about understanding, reading, and writing sentences. It also knows how sentences are used for communication purposes (Widdowson, 1981).

One of the significant characteristics of language learning materials is being communicative. Some modular learning allows students to design their educational programs in which they have the link with the communicative approach that stimulates their mental process and reflects their thinking. Therefore, it opened the possibility of having personalized learning to justify their option by "pedagogical arguments (learning would be accelerated, more profitable), educational (the methodological reflection on the foreign language would be supportive to the development of thinking process) or psychological (the adults, in particular, they "need to understand," they "ask for explanations." In fact, there is no learning without reflexive and cognitive processes being implemented, etc. (Besse & Porquier, 1991).

Students could always find ways to master a foreign language through their vast understanding of how the language is being used, how it functions, and how it can be learned (Paradowski & Bator, 2018). The mental process is said to play a significant role for students to compare and distinguish two different languages by its connections between words, phrases, voices, and structures which will help them discover a united sense of meaning in the forms of the language. L2 learning becomes difficult when students experience an inter-language that the language control is challenging a source and target language in its process. Indeed, learners need to have specific control in practicing a particular language.

Effectively, L1 intervention in the process of L2 establishes some mental and linguistic disturbances which need to be taken care of consciously to create precision in language production. This phenomenon

indicates bilingualism, which simultaneously controls two different languages (Wigglesworth & Chin, 2007). Generally, a bilingual person has particular linguistic flexibility, which is beneficial to adapt specific linguistic code and transformation in communication and access the multidimensional mental process which contains connection between two linguistics abilities in each language (Santoso, 2016).

The ability to effectively implement more than one language can be acquired by an effort to adapt entirely to multilingual surrounding and mental conditions in individual, social, and formal education contexts (Karahana, 2005; Baldauf, & Kaplan, 1997). This goal should be achieved through an elaborated pedagogy situation with typical adaptation experience from the L1 acquisition that is involved by the mental process to provide at least one linguistic system as a point of reference (Paradowski, 2017). These findings indicate a particular learning strategy that considers students' L1 and/or L2 profiles to stimulate metalinguistic awareness, which greatly helps linguistic realization (Carlisle, Beeman, Davis, & Spharim, 1999).

Students cannot avoid errors in using grammar. For example, a study from Pramesti, Mutiarsih, and Darmawangsa (2019) showed that students learning French in Indonesia tends to make errors in the proper tenses. In this regard, students must be trained to be able to reduce language errors. Hence, Students' ability to reduce language error in some way (i.e., transfer or interference) helps them use language with sufficient control. Then, the precise use of language is achieved through methodology practice and exercise to control speaking and writing so that learners can reduce their chances to commit errors (Richards & Reppen, 2014). Noah Chomsky has said that grammar contains the theory of structures that revolve around syntax, which results in the organized linguistic aspect of grammatical phrases. It is always a priority to produce a contextual expression that is grammatically correct so that it can be understood. The linguistics choices for conversational participation were influenced by the contexts produced by the participants (Cullen, 2012).

3. METHOD

This study aims to discover metasyntactic ability in French learning. Theoretically, it has many connections with various aspects. This study makes sure in a small group; some of its connection with the grammar competence. Methodological aspects might explain these various ideas, namely the target population, the Indonesian students of French, particularly in Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, which will be examined by measuring metasyntactic ability, grammar preference, and syntactic ability examined. The present study attempts to verify whether the particular contribution of metasyntactic ability to French grammar competence

would be the same among different levels of proficiency. A cross-sectional study was carried out in which 12 students (4 level B1, 4 level B2, and 4 level C1 students of French) were given a metasyntactic awareness repetition test, syntactic task, and grammatical preferences. This study also presents our findings from the literature study reviewing some concluding facts and strategies in learning for metasyntactic ability and then results from two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA).

2.1. Measurement Instruments

Three measurements instruments were used to examine metasyntactic, grammar preferences, and syntactic ability. In addition, some of the opinions about grammar learning and metasyntactic were asked via questionnaires. This study presents the procedures in each instrument in the following.

2.1.1. Metasyntactic measures

The test of replication of ungrammatical sentences has been believed to measure a metasyntactic awareness since the students must consciously reproduce an error (Gombert J. E., 1996; Lefrançois & Armand, 2003; Nocus & Gombert, 1997; Fortier & Simard, 2017). It has to proceed in oral so that the students will identify the syntactic errors they have listened to and respond directly to replicate the errors from the printed sentences on the visual supports.

In the sentence that the examiner dictated, it contains an error in pronoun placement. In order to answer correctly, students need to say aloud, "*L'orange? Elle adore la,*" to reproduce the same type of error (see Table 1).

2.1.2. Grammatical Preferences

Students encounter two sentences and choose one to decide a correct answer. It is not mainly a syntactic problem; this test will provide data about grammar competence in general. This study selects the questions which are often tricky and problematic to decide; if one is not familiar with its specific grammatical rules.

Le ciel est gris; je ne crois pas que la pluie aille cesser aujourd'hui.

Le ciel est gris; je ne crois pas que la pluie va cesser aujourd'hui.

In this case, students need to choose the first sentence to have a better answer.

Table 1. MSA test

Dictated sentence	Printed sentence	Correct answer
<i>«Le chocolat? J'aime le ».</i>	<i>L'orange? Elle l'adore.</i>	<i>«L'orange? Elle adore la ».</i>

Table 2. Syntactic test

Syntactic task	Correct answer
[d'entrée, – code – Le – t'en – tu – souviendras ?]	Le code d'entrée, tu t'en souviendras?

Language users use the subjunctive to express an opinion, desire, or emotion, but the *futur proche* is used when a person is certain about some action in the immediate future.

2.1.3. Syntactic Measures

This study uses syntactic tasks (Demont & Gombert, 1996) to discover the syntactic ability to make grammatical sentences. Students will need to look at the big picture to help them organize a sentence into its proper place.

The syntactic task is printed on the visual support. This study tests students' syntactic ability and asks them to answer orally, so this study can get actual results and avoid overcorrection (see Table 2).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Results

The participants have completed a series of tests and questionnaires in different individual sessions. The descriptive analysis finds that students in the B1 level of proficiency have scored lowest below the rest but not particularly in all scores. The C1 level had achieved almost perfect in average scores. The scores have ranged very closely as the SD has shown even all under ($SD > 2$) points (see Table 3).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

Performance	Descriptive					
	Group					
	B1		B2		C1	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
MSA	6	1,15	9,75	0,5	9,75	0,5
GP	2,25	1,5	2	0,81	4,25	0,5
S	1,62	0,47	3,375	0,75	4,81	0,23
Performance	Descriptive					
	ΣN=12					
	M			SD		
Meta-Syntactic	8,5			1,97		
Grammatical Preference	2,83			1,40		
Syntactic	3,27			1,44		

Table 4. Intero-relations among variables

	Meta-Syntactic	Grammatical Preference	Syntactic
Meta-Syntactic	1		
Grammatical Preference	0,16	1	
Syntactic	0,72	0,67	1

This study finds a strong correlation between MSA and syntactic ability, which is predictable to happen. Nevertheless, MSA results do not have some connection to grammatical preferences. On the other hand, syntactic ability maintains a good correlation with both MSA and grammatical preferences (see Table 4).

These findings are exciting because now teachers can discover more of MSA's nature and use it to excel teaching process. This study groups the scores based on the participants' French level of proficiency (n=4) and has done a random sampling to gather them in a group (n=3) (see Table 5).

In treatments effect, the F value was more significant than F critical, which means the variances have existed in a participants' average score of MSA results based on their proficiency levels as a group. However, in the blocks effect, the F value was smaller than F critical. So, this study can safely assume that variances were not happening in participants' average score of MSA results, despite their differences in proficiency levels (see Table 6).

Table 5. Group of participants

SUMMARY	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
Group 1	3	25	8,3	8,33
Group 2	3	24	8	7
Group 3	3	26	8,66	2,33
Group 4	3	27	9	3
B1	4	24	6	1,33
B2	4	39	9,75	0,25
C1	4	39	9,75	0,25

Table 6. ANOVA results

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Block	1,66	3	0,55	0,86	0,50	4,75
Treatment	37,5	2	18,7	29,3	0,00	5,14
Error	3,83	6	0,638			
Total	43	11				

4.2. Discussion

The present study sought to provide initial data, particularly for Indonesian students of French and theoretical foundation to define some nature to focus more on MSA to benefit learning processes. The question is addressed on how MSA has a particular contribution to French grammar competencies. Generally, any learning method has the ambition to establish a learning activity that is accessible for all students. So, when using a particular strategy, teachers must consider all the typologies of learning, so they can help the learners to reach learning goals in a balanced way, despite the variances of unique characteristics of the students in the class. Basically, all the strategies must be practiced, but each portion of the typologies can be varied according to the learners' preferences. According to the studies from Oxford University, if learners have generally used some preferred strategies, learners can adapt a little bit to the other strategy so that learners can achieve more results effectively. "Learning style is very personal, and it influences an individual's choice of which strategy to use. Learners use their natural tendency to learn if teachers do not teach them how to use strategies or typologies in a balanced and collective way (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989; Oxford, 1996a; Oxford, 1996b). In this regard, a certain balanced diet of strategy is very likely to be the key to success in foreign language education; teachers can boost learning effectiveness by introducing the strategy in the learning process.

Regarding the skill to manipulate and manage how one thinks strategically about one's cognitive problem, it is a practical way to facilitate the process of the integrality of knowledge. In general, the "meta" is an internal ability to manage oneself, knowledge, and skill. So, the development of human cognitive is always a part of personal development; it is essential to serve a comprehensive function on the cognitive tasks; to identify objects, form analogies, make interferences to enlarge the knowledge and transmit a central element of the theory (Gelman & Diesendruck, 1999).

In fact, recent research expresses that meta-syntactic competence plays a primary role in high-level trials on L2 reading comprehension activity (Lefrançois & Armand, 2003), including the relationship between meta-syntactic competence (which was measured on the ungrammatical sentence repetition test and replication task) and reading comprehension of native and non-native children. Briefly, the result indicates the significant contribution in the metasyntactic ability to reading comprehension for both native and non-native (Simard, Foucambert, & Labelle, 2014; Simard, Fortier, & Foucambert, 2013).

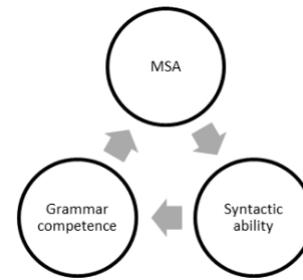


Figure 1 Correlation of MSA to grammar competence.

5. CONCLUSION

Inconsistencies in MSA abilities in each level of proficiency shows that teachers' have not yet put enough attention on mental process development, particularly the metasyntactic, in foreign language education, particularly in French learning. It proves that learners need to implement a balanced diet in L2 learning strategy to master the language (Oxford, 1996a; Oxford, 1996b). Based on the findings, the study concludes that giving more focus on metasyntactic awareness will facilitate grammar mastery through syntactic ability (see Figure 1).

MSA as the goal of the meta-syntactic strategy concerns conscious language control in the syntactic aspect by actively doing manipulation and focus to sentence production, hierarchical classification in the set of words, organization of expressions to clauses or sentences, and language interpretation concerning grammatical analysis or logical analysis, as well as developing a syntactic habit that relies completely on automation. Thus, awareness describes a mental condition and competence to conduct mental processes (Bialystok, 2001; Harley, 2013; Simard, Labelle, & Bergeron, 2017). So, it is essential to focus on classification and grammatical regulation in terms of sentence structure such as determiners, verbs, conjunctions, subjects, etc.

Finally, the metasyntactic aims to facilitate the learners or interlocutors with the point of view of mental and memorization to benefice well the grammatical competence to consciously make a language activity and respecting structural framework, also the ability to produce or understand sentences in syntactic and contextual way.

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