



A Corpus Linguistic Analysis of the Words of *Aku* and *Saya* in Indonesian Children Essays

Devi Ambarwati Puspitasari*, Hernina, Indah Okitasari, Yenny Karlina

Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional

*Corresponding author. Email: devi018@brin.go.id

ABSTRACT

In writing essays, children often have difficulty putting together words to express their thoughts, even for simple themes such as self-introduction and school. A hundred children aged 6 -10 years from various cities in Indonesia have filled out a questionnaire and composed four short essays with the theme of self-introduction. They are directed to the theme and free to write without rules and restrictions. The research aims at figuring out the word patterns in the Indonesian children's essays through linguistic corpus analysis and identifying the thoughts and desires of Indonesian children conceived in the essays. The four hundred Indonesian children's essays have been processed into the Indonesian Children's Story Corpus consisting of 7,815 tokens and 1,650-word types. Based on the frequency analysis, it has been found that the domination of the used word is *aku* as 5,6% compared to *saya* merely used as 3,6% of all over the tokens. Based on the collocation analysis, *aku* in the children's essays tended to use three expressions, namely (1) 11% preference, (2) 7% ownership, and (3) 6% desire of the 440 hits. Meanwhile, *saya* used to express (1) 25% desire, (2) 19% name, and (3) 18% negative sentences followed by the word of *tidak* of the 77 hits. The concordance and cluster analyses of the corpus identified three sub-essay topics: selves, families, and hobbies. The essays revealed that most Indonesian children experienced bullying and learning difficulties in their schools. They also necessarily yearned for family relationships and enjoyed quality time with parents.

Keywords: *Children, Corpus, Essay, Writing.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding how children learn to write also helps to be aware of how they learned to speak. That happened quite incidentally, without us adults having to steer, teach or correct anything (Steinig & Betzel, 2014). The children listened, absorbed everything that was spoken in their environment and, over the years, produced increasingly complex sentences (Weinhold, 2006). It all happens on the fly, and the child learns without thinking about how the complex language system into which they were born works (Vogt, 2004). As such, it is no wonder that many children have both the ability to read and write when they start the primary school years.

Despite their knowledge on reading and writing, most primary school students have not had the ability to write well. Most of them are interested in rhymes and enjoy games (Weinhold, 2006) as well as probably “get a foothold in written culture” (Maas 2015, p. 43). However, writing skill is something that needs to be taught, institutionally controlled and method-dependent.

A number of studies describing writing skills in children have increased by leading them to themes that are close to them (Kurnia, 2018) and utilizing various learning methods and media (Mahmud, 2017; Wardani & Irfan, 2020). Many such things have been attempted, both by teachers and language researchers, as an effort to provide new knowledge and alternative methods in improving children's writing skills. Besides, in school, teachers can also use explicit teaching to support students to write. Explicit and systematic teaching of writing strategies are considered effective to use in teaching writing to children in many schools (Koster, et.al., 2015). In other words, children will be more active in writing when teachers assist them in every single writing phase and deliver some proper topics for them.

Apart from the various factors that influence the success of children in developing and improving their writing skills, there is considerable curiosity about Indonesian children's writing skills like “How did they experience language acceptance in elementary school and how did they apply it in writing?”. Three studies

reveal that children tend to be free to imagine and express their feelings and thoughts honestly (Isnaini, 2020; Salbiah, 2019; Wardani & Irfan, 2020). It is very important to see the honest work of children, in this case the ability to write, without being burdened with symbols of school assignments or exams and the limitations of the material or theory they have received so far. This is done solely to see how children's writing skills are if they are given the freedom of expression to produce a productive work with a theme that is close to them.

Complaints about poor productive skills, especially writing from elementary school students in Indonesia have been heard from the public, teachers, and even students throughout the country. The reason is claimed that both teachers are less competent in the teaching process or students who are not motivated to produce language (Isnaini, 2020; Salbiah, 2019; Wardani & Irfan, 2020). The education system, in this case education in Indonesia, must also be responsible for the lack of language learners (Aisy & Adzani, 2019; Wardani & Irfan, 2020), both Indonesian and foreign languages, in productive skills, because they are considered not to provide an effective education system for learning language. The weakness of students during the language learning process, especially writing skills, is caused by a number of phenomena, including difficulties in involving patterns from the mother tongue, showing the purpose of using grammar, choosing and arranging words.

Research related to the application of the methods to improve the quality of writing above still does not answer the question of how authentic is Indonesian children's writing? How is their productivity in writing the themes that are close to them? And how is their writing pattern in writing when the assignment given is not assessed for school assignments? It is essential to identify how they apply the knowledge they receive in the classroom to their daily lives. Therefore, this study tries to find Indonesian students' ability in essay writing, including pattern and thoughts conveying ideas through authentic essay writing.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on teaching writing for primary school students can be traced back to 1980s. Early methods of teaching writing encouraged children to write according to the prompt sounds given to them besides systematic instruction on letters, word building blocks, vocabulary, reading and so on (see Vogt, 2004). The methods enabled students to practice writing and eventually the ability to read come naturally. These children learned implicitly, self-directed, and like sponges absorbing into their own writings whatever they can observe about the written language (Steinig, 2004). However, children whose language skills or implicit language learning skills were not well supported before school could be left behind in these lessons and feel the break very clearly (Kuhl, 2018).

Sometimes they always find it difficult to make the step from spoken language to written language, sometimes also because they do not know words or cannot derive them from basic words. All of this can apply to open teaching concepts as well as to primer lessons. Moreover, Kuhl and Röhr-Sendlmeier (2018) found that teachers' competence and knowledge affect the students writing performance. The higher the teacher's specialist knowledge, the weaker the connection between the students' intelligence and spelling performance. Also if the teacher's knowledge is low, the connection between intelligence and spelling performance is more pronounced.

Interestingly, recent studies pointed out the effect of education policy. Steinig and Betzel (2013) argued "The Spelling Catastrophe" which showed that the higher the teacher's specialist knowledge, the weaker the connection between the students' intelligence and spelling performance. Also, if the teacher's knowledge is low, the connection between intelligence and spelling performance is more pronounced. Furthermore, Kuhl and Röhr-Sendlmeier (2018) draws a much more obvious result: "The frequency of errors correlates to a much greater extent than before with the social status of the parents. Lower-class children make significantly more mistakes than lower- and upper-middle-class children."

The situation above is not quite different from Indonesia. In teaching Bahasa Indonesia, there are three aspects that need to be considered, namely aspects of knowledge or competence, skills and attitudes (Salbiah, 2019). The three aspects are related to knowledge, feelings, and skills or language activities, respectively. These three aspects must be balanced so that the actual language teaching objectives can be achieved. If language teaching is too much tinkering with grammatical aspects (theory), students will know about the language rules that are not necessarily applied in speech and writing as well. Indonesian language is closely related to Indonesian language teachers, namely people whose job is to deliver Indonesian language lessons every day.

The success or failure of teaching Indonesian is indeed determined by teacher factors, aside from other factors like student factors, learning methods, curriculum (including syllabus), teaching materials and books, and no less important is the school library accompanied by adequate management. In the education world, Indonesian language skill needs to put more pressure on considering Indonesian language proficiency among students is also due to the quality of teachers. In addition, the emergence of the assumption that every Indonesian must be able to speak Indonesian. This assumption actually contributes to the confusion of the Indonesian language world itself (Badudu, 1988).

A fact in 2017 revealed by UNICEF shows that children aged five are already used to holding gadgets, especially cell phones. Globalization and the development of the digital world have affected children's lives. A lot of studies have already discussed it, but this research discussion has not reached yet to see the connection or correlation between children's productive language skills and the advancement of the digital world.

Productive language skills relate to speaking and writing skills since those skills actively produce the language. However, this research focused on writing skill only. Writing gives many benefits not only on learning language, but also in other activities like developing children's artistic and communication through written expression. Various efforts have also been made to improve children's writing skills. This research focused on how far the language education the Indonesian children receive and the digital world they live in. Hence, the research examines the results of children's writing using gadgets.

Studies have revealed that children's writing skills have increased by leading to specific themes and media (Isnaini, 2020; Salbiah, 2019; Wardani & Irfan, 2020). From those studies, the research adopted familiar themes for children or those close to children's world, namely personal-introduction, school, family and friends, and social media as well as the internet. In addition, the children were asked to compose short essays by using digital tools like computers, phones or tablets.

Although the research did not explore much the influence of gadgets on children's writing skill, the focus of the research still related to writing skill in the form of essays produced from chosen themes, and the use of digital tools on composing essays. Meanwhile, the corpus linguistic approach was also used to obtain large amounts of language data and statistical significance.

3. METHOD

The data of the research was taken from a questionnaire as the instrument. The questionnaire form was open-ended and closed questions that concerned children's personal information and asked the children to compose four short essays with different themes. In order to ease children to understand the questionnaire, the questions began with an example, and ended with a command. Moreover, every single word of the questionnaire was written in Indonesian with selected words that hopefully could stimulate children to write. The children were asked to compose short essays by using digital tools like computers, phones or tablets.

The research distributed the online form questionnaire to children aged 6 to 12 on social media platforms. The reason for choosing this age range is based on a UNICEF survey (2017), that the range of children aged 6 to 12 years in Indonesia is able to write,

can operate gadgets, understand the theme of self-introduction and the surrounding environment. Based on previous research (Isnaini, 2020; Salbiah, 2019; Wardani & Irfan, 2020), it was also stated that in this range children are still learning to write, choose words, and compose sentences in an essay. This study does not distinguish between children's abilities, because the age range will affect. This study focuses on looking at the picture of children's writing productivity, how they choose words and compose sentences, as well as the thoughts and desires that arise from an honest writing from a child. Because this paper is not submitted for school assignments, it is hoped that they can write authentically.

Besides using social media platforms, the questionnaire was also promoted to parents, communities and schools. The research limited the participants to 100 children. Based on the research data, a hundred children's responses from various cities in Indonesia along with 400 texts had been collected. The texts were taken from children's essays as their writing tasks.

All language data was transferred into the corpus tool which was the open source one, namely Antconc version 4.1 for Linux (Anthony, 2015). The result of the data processed by the corpus tool was the Corpus Indonesian Children Essays (ICE Corpus) consisting of 7815 tokens (words that appear) and 1650 of word types. For the analysis, rank, frequency, collocation, concordant, and concordant plot features have been employed in the research.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of data processing and analysis using the corpus tool, especially the word list feature, the first highest word used by the children in their essay was the word *aku*. The frequency analysis revealed that the domination of the used word is *aku* as 5,6% compared to *saya* merely used as 3,6% of all over the tokens. In other words, 63% of respondents wrote essays using *aku*, whereas 27% of the rest respondents chose *saya*.

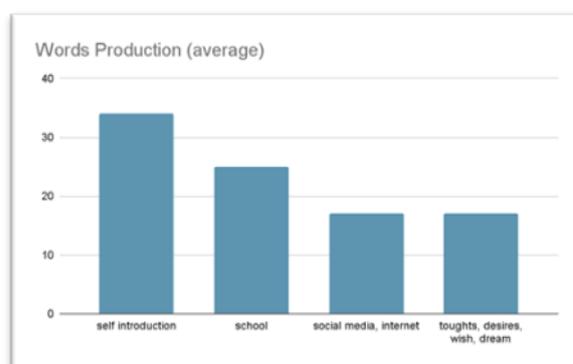


Figure 1 Average words production by theme.

The words “*aku*” and “*saya*” are personal pronouns in Bahasa Indonesia. *Aku* and *saya* refer to the first person and mean “I, me or my or mine” in English depending on the situation or sentence. The word “*saya*” is more formal than “*aku*” in Bahasa Indonesia. In this case, the researcher tried to find out which words between “*aku*” and “*saya*” the children prefer and how they use the words by concerning the corpus analyses.

Based on the results of data analysis, the children’s language productivity on the writing skill can be seen. Among the four writing themes, namely personal-introduction, school, family and friends, and social media as well as the internet, it was seen that the children were very productive when writing about the personal introduction theme. They were more enthusiastic in conveying about their family members, pets, and favorite toys or books like the example below.

“*Hai, namaku XXX, Biasanya aku di panggil Dhita. Aku beruntung sekali memiliki orang tua yang sangat penyayang dan juga sabar. Aku juga mempunyai kakak perempuan yang sangat cantik dan baik hati. Aku juga mempunyai hewan peliharaan seekor kelinci bernama Mimit. Mimit lucu sekali. Setiap hari Mimit bermain-main bersama ku dan kakak.*”

“Hi, my name is XXX, usually I’m called Dhita. I am very lucky to have very loving and patient parents. I also have an older sister who is very beautiful and kind. I also have a pet rabbit named Mimit. Mimit is so funny. Every day Mimit plays with my sister and I.”

Going into some more details about the content of the essays, the children could produce up to 125 words in writing personal-introduction. However, some of them worked with only 3 words: *nama saya Jeny*. For school themes, they were also productive. Many children expressed their learning difficulties and experienced bullying at school.

“*Di sekolah aku baru mengikuti latihan drumband bersama teman teman. Aku suka kalau pakai dengan stik drumnya, tapi aku tidak suka dengan pianika. Mama juga minta latihan pianika, tapi aku tidak suka karena susah niupnya. Pelajaran Matematika, Bahasa Inggris dan Bahasa Sunda juga sangat susah. Gurunya tidak mau mengajari aku, selalu menyuruh mengerjakan soal sulit dan marah kalau aku ketinggalan. Bu Guru hanya suka anak yang pintar saja.*”

“At school I just joined the drum band practice with my friends. I like to use it with the drumsticks, but I don’t like the piano. Mama also asked for piano practice, but I didn’t like it because it was hard to play. Mathematics, English and Sundanese are also

very difficult. The teacher didn’t want to teach me, always telling me to do difficult questions and getting angry if I missed it. My teacher only likes smart kids.”

“*Aku senang ketika sekolah tapi aku gak suka sama Yafi, soalnya dia anaknya sukaukul orang dan aku pernah di pukul pake kotak krayon. Terus dagu aku berdarah akhirnya aku di obatin di UKS. Yafi punya teman dua anak laki-laki, aku selalu diganggu, diejek.*”
“I was happy when I was at school, but I didn’t like Yafi, because he likes to hit his friends and I was hit with a crayon box. Then my chin was bleeding, finally I was treated at the UKS. Yafi’s friends were two boys, I’m always bullied, teased.”

From table 1, the theme of social media and desire, their writings were classified as less productive. Most of them wrote quite short about how their parents allowed them to use gadgets; and they just spent more time playing games and watching videos. For the social media, they generally mentioned their access on YouTube and TikTok.

“*Aku belum mempunyai akun sosial media, karena kata Abi, aku masih kecil. Tapi aku suka melihat dan menonton YouTube dan aplikasi TikTok. Karena banyak konten-konten seru dan lucu yang mengisi waktu senggangku.*”

“I don’t have a social media account yet, because Abi says, I’m still a kid. But I love watching and watching YouTube and the TikTok app. Because there is a lot of fun and funny content that fills my free time.”

For themes of desire and hope, they also tended to be less productive. They were not able to express their thoughts and hopes. The word production was low. However, the content of the essay is mostly interesting. Most of them wished to have quality time with their families like having a vacation with their parents.

Table 1. The highest and the lowest words-production

| Theme | Highest (words) | Lowest (words) |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| Self introduction | 125 | 3 |
| School | 192 | 2 |
| Social media, internet | 98 | 4 |
| Thoughts, desires, wish, dream | 117 | 2 |

“*mau liburan*” [want vacation]
 “*Aku ingin ke pantai.*” [I want to go to the beach.]
 “*mau pergi sama mama papa*” [going somewhere with mom and dad]

The short sentences above were written by 12 year-olds who already have better writing skills and more vocabulary than the lowest age group in this study. This proves that the theme of desire and hope cannot be explored by children. It is possible that they are also not used to expressing wishes and hopes. However, this requires further research to explore the background of why children who are already able to write well become unproductive when given this theme.

As shown on figure 2 and also table 2, based on the data taken from the typing words and the ICE Corpus results, token “*aku*” was on the first rank. In other words, 70% of children preferred using the word “*aku*” to the word “*saya*”. The use of the word “*aku*” has been examined in more detail based on collocation and concordance, as well as plot concordance. From the three features it can be concluded that children were more likely to use the word “*aku*” to express preference, ownership and desire. Meanwhile, the word “*saya*” was used to write wishes, names, and negative sentences. The percentage of the use of the words “*aku*” and “*saya*” came from the highest three of all the hits that appeared. The word “*aku*” expressing names also appeared in the children’s writing, yet it was not in the top three list. An interesting thing emerged from the data. The word “*aku*” used in a more informal way in Indonesian was not really taken into account in children’s essays. The children seemed not really cared about word choice in writing. Around 73% of the essays using the word “*aku*” were written in standard sentences and spellings. It started with a capital letter and ended with a period. It was simple, but they did it perfectly. No abbreviations and word choice used in the formal form were found in their writings. Nonetheless, it’s probably too early to say that the role of gadgets has had great influence on children’s writing because of their obedience to grammar and what their teachers have taught in class. In contrast to adults who automatically ignore formal writing rules when writing with electronic media, especially when the word “free writing” is emphasized.

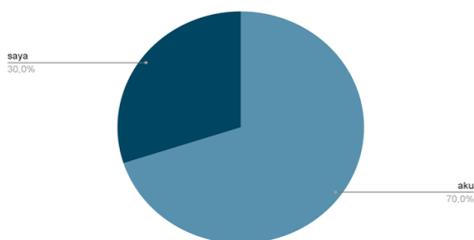


Figure 2 The use of the words “*aku*” and “*saya*”.

Table 2. The top three of the use words “*aku*” and “*saya*”

| Usage | <i>Aku</i> (440 hits) | <i>Saya</i> (77 hits) |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Preference | 11% | |
| Ownership | 7% | |
| Desire | 6% | 25% |
| Name | | 19% |
| Negative sentences | | 18% |

Children’s experiences with writing and creating texts is an important way for self-expression for children. These experiences also support precursors to their later reading and writing development (Saracho, 2017; Puranik & Lonigan, 2011). As children are scaffolded by educators to participate in more varied experiences with writing, their ability to create complex, multimodal texts develops. However, it sometimes makes children difficult and restricts them from expressing themselves. Therefore, it is not uncommon that they are not as productive as expected in producing words. Nevertheless, when the freedom of writing is fully given to children, they feel not too afraid to make mistakes. When they are given writing examples, they feel more comfortable in writing. Not surprisingly, the children can be very productive in writing as shown in this research.

In school settings, it is important to think of the writing pedagogies above as fluid and dynamic, rather than as fixed or separate. In these experiences, educators can model and scaffold at different levels of support according to the needs of the child. This allows educators to create learning experiences that are responsive, intentional, and catering to the learning needs of individual children or child-centered (VEYLDF, 2016). Therefore, educators can work to encourage modeled or shared or independent writing behaviors, depending on factors like the children’s previous writing experiences, their familiarity with the materials, and the text construction process. Engaging children in the writing process would also be more productive rather than creating adults’ own texts. Doing brainstorming together builds a good report with children in writing activity.

5. CONCLUSION

The concordance and cluster analyses of the corpus identified three sub-essay topics: selves, families, and hobbies. This research described how Indonesian children thought of their school lives, social media and personal wishes. The essays revealed that most Indonesian children experienced bullying and learning difficulties in their schools. Smartphone use was also common for them to actively access and play social media such as Instagram, Youtube and TikTok. Besides dreaming of cell phones, toys and bicycles, Indonesian

children necessarily yearned for family relationships and enjoyed quality time with parents.

In terms of the corpus obtained, the use of “*aku*” and “*saya*” which means first personal pronoun reveals the chosen contexts. The former refers to preference, ownership, and desire. The latter, interestingly, is used to express desire, name, and negative sentences. The finding then shows that these children do not care very much about the formality/informality of this first personal pronoun, but the opportunity to write freely within the themes close to them enable them to express themselves in the way they like.

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