

# Analysis of Thematic Roles in Acquisition of Active and Passive Sentence on Four-Year-Old Children

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## ABSTRACT

Mastery of active and passive sentences in this study is part of acquiring Indonesian as children's first language. This study aims to describe the mastery of thematic roles in active and passive Indonesian sentences which are spoken from the speech of 4-year-old children. This study focused on the thematic roles in active and passive voice of 4 years old related to the types of verbs in active and passive voice. The approach used is descriptive qualitative. Data in the form of speeches of children aged 4 years with a total of 5 participants. Data collection was carried out in two ways, namely case studies and corpus data. Data analysis was carried out using the thematic role theory proposed by Andrews (1958) and Radford (1988) in Saeed (2016, pp. 150-151). The results showed that the thematic role of the active sentence was patterned by actor, patient, receiver, instrument, and location. For passive sentences, the thematic roles are patient and patient + actor. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that children aged 4 years are able to use complex sentences, namely active sentences and passive sentences. In addition, they not only mastered verbs but also mastered thematic roles in active and passive sentences.

**Keywords:** Active sentence, passive sentence, thematic roles, 4-year-old children

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language skills can only be possessed by humans. Every day humans use language for various purposes, including speaking, expressing ideas, expressing intentions, expressing meaning, and so on. Chomsky in Dardjowidjojo (2000) states that humans have what are called the faculties of the mind, which are intellectual (and abstract) lots in human minds/brains. One of these lots is allocated for the use and acquisition of language. No other primate in the world has such this lot. Since birth, children have been naturally equipped with language skills in the form of an abstract mechanism called the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). The process of language development is carried out naturally by a child. Children will go through various stages of language development through language acquisition. Language acquisition is the process of mastering the mother tongue or first language in children.

At the age of about 1 year and 18 months, children begin to produce one word about objects, animals, pictures, or toys such as *mother, father, cat, and ball*. In the first year of life, a child will spend his/her time observing and gathering as much information as possible. This observation is made through all of his/her

senses. What is observed and collected becomes "knowledge of the world". Based on this knowledge, children acquire the semantic aspects of language by attaching a fixed "meaning" to a certain sequence of sounds in a particular language (Chaer, 2015).

In the age range of 2.5–5 years, children's skills in distinguishing the use of words and sentences are very noticeable. According to Mar'at (2005) the general features of language development through this period are as follows:

1. By the end of the period, the children have mastered their mother tongue in general, meaning that the basic grammar of an adult has been acquired.
2. The development of phonological aspect has been accomplished. There may still be difficulties pronouncing compound and slightly complex consonants.
3. Vocabulary is developed, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Several abstract meanings such as time, space, and quantum began to emerge.

4. Nouns and verbs begin to become more differentiated in their usage, marked by the use of prepositions, pronouns, and auxiliary verbs.
5. The language function for communication is really starting to work, the children are already able to make conversations in a way that adults can understand.
6. The children's perceptions and experiences about the outside world begin to be shared with others, by providing an act of criticizing, asking questions, ordering, telling, etc. (Mysak, 1961).
7. The development in morphology has begun, marked by the production of plurals, changes in noun suffixes, changes in verbs.

Mastery of active and passive sentences in 4-year-old children is part of the language acquisition study. Children at the age of 4 have sufficiently developed their language skills. Piaget in Tarigan (1988) describe that the age of 3-4 years is the age of grammar development, and 4-5 years is the age of pre-adult development. Chaer (2013) states that the 3-year olds are familiar with dialogue patterns. The children have already understood when it is their turn to speak and when it is for their interlocutor. This development lasts until the age of 4 years.

Based on the explanation above, the use of active voice and passive voice in children has begun at the age of 4 years. Each child will be able to utter the active and passive voice without realizing consciously. The mastery of active and passive voice by the 4-year olds are also influenced by the types of verbs that are attached to these two types of voices. This happens because the 4-year-old children have already acquired the syntactic and semantic skills.

The thematic role in a sentence is determined by the verb. Verbs will arrange nouns in sentences to get their respective roles. Thematic roles can show the roles of subjects and objects in an argument (sentence). Thematic roles are closely related to the syntactic structure and semantic meaning of sentences. This study aims to identify and describe the thematic role of active voice and passive voice in 4-year-old children.

Research on thematic roles has been researched by several previous researchers to analyse sentences in a language or other sources such as English sentences in Korean language learners (Kang & Morita, 2014), Igbo language (Okeke, 2012), the effect of thematic roles on pronouns use and frequency of reference continuation (Arnold, 2001), theta roles in the German-Indonesian translation (Pradianti, 2017).

The previous research that examines the acquisition of passive sentences. Fitriyani (2016) examines and discusses the use of passive sentences in children with the use of Sundanese mother language by paying

attention to passive sentence patterns in Sundanese and analysing passive verb arguments related to semantic roles to determine their dominance in terms of meaning and linking them to gender.

Research on semantics has been conducted by Nugraha (2017) to describes the deviation of children's speech in the field of semantics, namely the mismatch between one word spoken and its reference 4-years-old-children. Haryadi's (2017) research is also to reveal how the thematic role structure in the utterances of 13-year-old autistic children. Impuni (2012) describes the acquisition of a single sentence and compound sentence syntax in children aged five years using the story of Indonesian. Guat (2006) describes compound sentences in children aged 5 years and the factors that affect basic Indonesian vocabulary.

Based on this background, this study focuses on "thematic roles in the use of active sentences and passive sentences aged 4 years" using the thematic role theory put forward by Andrews (1958) and Radford (1988) in Saeed (2016). This study seeks to determine the thematic role of active and passive voice in the speech of children 4-year-old children.

## **2. METHOD**

This study used a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to investigate and describe the use of thematic roles in active sentences and passive sentences in the utterances of 4-year-old children. Moleong (2017) defines the qualitative research as a research intended to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects such as behaviour, perceptions, motivation, actions, etc. in a holistic manner, and by means of descriptions in the form of words and language, in a specific natural context and by making use of various natural methods. Language data in this study were considered suitable to the qualitative research because they were obtained in a natural way.

The descriptive method was used in this research to explain the data and elaborate it according to the facts of the language data. Kothari (2004) states that qualitative research tends to be descriptive in nature and uses analysis to explain phenomena in as much detail as possible through in-depth data collection. The deeper and more detailed the data obtained, the better the quality of the qualitative research.

The research data were collected from observations and corpus from the Child Care in Bandung and Jakarta Child Language. From the two data sources, around 107 active sentences and 27 passive sentences were obtained. Data were analysed using the thematic role theory introduced by Andrews (1958) and Radford (1988) in Saeed (2016, pp. 150-151) which includes the agent, patient, theme, experiencer, beneficiary, instrument, location, goal, source, and stimulus.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following are the findings and discussion thematic roles active sentence and passive sentence.

#### 3.1. Thematic roles active sentence

##### 1. The agent is an initiator who initiates or performs an action.

[s Kelinci [<sub>Adv</sub> sedang [<sub>VP</sub> ngumpul]]

agent

The active sentence uses the transitive verb root 'ngumpul' which indicates the activity of gathering. The transitive verb of the root word 'ngumpul' requires the presence of an argument to the subject in the form of a noun which acts as an agent, namely 'Kelinci'. Kelinci become the agent because kelinci is the actor performing the act of gathering or joining forces.

[s Aku [<sub>VP</sub> masuk]]

agent

The active sentence uses the transitive verb root 'enter' which indicates the activity of going into a place. The transitive verb root 'enter' requires the presence of an argument to the subject in the form of a noun which acts as an agent, namely 'I'. I became an agent because I became an actor who got into a place.

##### 2. The patient is an entity that experiences the effects of the action.

[s Lion [<sub>Adv</sub> sedang [<sub>VP</sub> memakan [<sub>NP</sub> apel]]

agent

patient

The active sentence uses the transitive verb 'to eat' which indicates the activity of eating fruit, namely apples. The transitive verb 'to eat' requires the presence of an argument to the subject in the form of a noun acting as agent, 'lion' and a noun acting as a patient, 'apple'. Lion becomes the agent because lion becomes an actor who takes the action of eating apples. Apples become the patient because they experience the effects of eating.

[s Aku [<sub>VP</sub> potong [<sub>NP</sub> sayur bayem]]

agent

patient

The active sentence uses the transitive verb root 'cut' which indicates the activity of cutting an object. The transitive verb of the root word 'cut' requires the presence of an argument to the subject in the form of a

noun that acts as an agent, namely 'I' and an object in the form of a noun that acts as the patient, namely 'spinach'.

##### 3. Beneficiary is an entity that receives benefits from an action.

[s Aku [<sub>VP</sub> sayang [<sub>NP</sub> Pooh]]

agent

beneficiary

The active sentence uses the transitive verb root 'Sayang' which shows the activity of loving something. The transitive verb of the root word 'affection' requires the presence of an argument to the subject in the form of a noun that acts as an agent, namely 'I' and an object in the form of a noun that acts as a receiver, namely 'Po' who receives an advantage.

[s Mba Anya kan [<sub>VP</sub> suka [<sub>NP</sub> Winnie the Pooh]]

agent

beneficiary

The active sentence uses the transitive verb root 'like' which indicates the activity of liking something. The transitive verb of the root word 'like' requires the presence of an argument to the subject in the form of a noun that acts as an agent, namely 'Mba Anya' and an object in the form of a noun that acts as a recipient, namely 'Winnie the Pooh' who receives an advantage.

##### 4. Instruments are tools or means used to take action or make something happen.

[s Dek Ido [<sub>Ad</sub> mo [<sub>VP</sub> naek [<sub>NP</sub> jembatan]]

agent

instrument

The active sentence uses the non-transitive verb 'naek' which indicates the activity of climbing on an object. The non-transitive verb of the root word 'naek' requires the presence of an argument to the subject in the form of a noun that acts as an agent, namely 'Dek Ido' and an object in the form of a noun that acts as an instrument, namely 'bridge'.

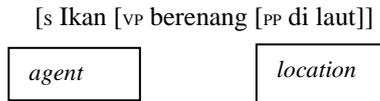
[s Mamas [<sub>VP</sub> maen [<sub>NP</sub> traktor-traktor]]

agent

instrument

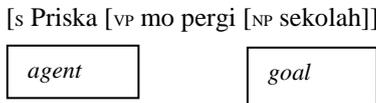
The active voice uses the transitive verb of the root word 'maen' which indicates the activity of playing a toy. Transitive The basic verb 'maen' requires arguments on the subject in the form of nouns that act as agents, namely 'Mamas' and objects in the form of nouns that act as instruments of 'tractors'.

**5. Location is a place for something happens.**



The active sentence uses the non-transitive verb 'swim' which indicates the activity of moving the body across the water using fins. The non-transitive verb 'swim' requires the presence of an argument to the subject in the form of a noun that acts as an agent, namely 'fish' and a place description which acts as a location, namely 'at sea'.

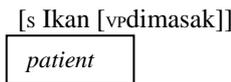
**6. Goal is a place or something that is directed.**



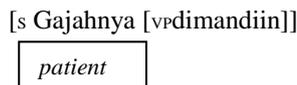
The active sentence uses the transitive verb root 'go' which indicates the activity of moving forward to a destination. The transitive verb 'to go' requires the presence of an argument to the subject in the form of a noun that acts as an agent, namely 'Priska' and an object in the form of a place that acts as a goal, namely 'school'.

**3.2. Thematic Roles Passive Sentence**

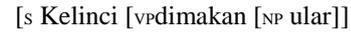
**1. Patients are characterized by something that experiences treatment as a result of an action or experiences a change in circumstances.**



The passive voice is characterized by a verb with the affix 'to be cooked' which is a passive verb from 'to cook'. This passive verb requires the presence of an argument to the subject in the form of a noun which acts as the patient, namely 'fish'. 'Fish' get the treatment due to 'being cooked'.



The sentence is included in the passive sentence marked by the verb with the affix 'to be bathed' which is a passive verb from 'to bathe'. This passive verb requires the presence of an argument to the subject in the form of a noun which acts as the patient, namely 'Elephant'. 'Elephant' gets treatment due to 'being bathed'.



The passive voice is characterized by the verb with the affix 'to be eaten' which is a passive verb from 'to eat'. The passive verb requires the presence of an argument to the subject in the form of a noun which acts as a patient, namely 'rabbit' and an object in the form of a noun, namely 'snake'. 'Rabbit' gets the treatment due to 'being eaten' by a 'snake'.

The thematic role in this study was carried out to analyse the roles contained in active voice and passive voice spoken by children aged 4 years. The verb in this case regulates the roles that nouns will have in active and passive sentences from both syntactic and semantic structures. Syntactically, the role that each sentence has is different. If in the active voice there must be two thematic roles such as *agent + patient*, *agent + receiver*, *agent + instrument*, *agent + location*, and *agent + goal*. For passive sentences, the thematic role that must exist is the *patient* which semantically needs to be generalized. This all stems from the meaning of the verb. The meaning of verbs can determine the syntactic and semantic structure. That way children already know the meaning of verbs that affect sentence structure and the thematic roles of nouns. These findings are linguistic evidence that supports children's psycholinguistic and cognitive development. In the development of psycholinguistics Dardjowidjojo (2003) states that children will imitate and imitate their environment, so children will use informal verbs. In cognitive development, Piaget stated that at the age of 4, children have entered the stage of representation of intelligence. At this stage, the child can form symbolic representations of objects such as symbolic games, imitation, mental images, and pictures. After the stage of intelligence representation and symbolic representation ends, the children's language will develop and acquire social values. Linguistic structures begin to be formed based on general cognitive forms that have been formed when they are approximately two years old (in Chaer, 2015).

**4. CONCLUSION**

The mastery of the active voice and the passive voice has been achieved by all participants in this study. More active sentences were produced in this study than passive sentences. For active sentences, the children tend to use transitive verbs of root words, semi transitive verbs, transitive verbs, and non-transitive verbs. The appearance of basic transitive verbs is more than all the types of verbs that have been categorized.

For passive sentences, the verbs that appear are passive verbs with 'di-' and 'di-in' affixes.

The thematic role in this study was carried out to analyse the roles contained in active and passive sentences spoken by children at the age of 4. Verbs in this case regulates the roles that nouns will have in active and passive sentences from both syntactic and semantic structures. Syntactically, the role that each sentence has is different. If in the active voice there must be two thematic roles such as agent + patient, agent + receiver, agent + instrument, agent + location, and agent + goal. For passive sentences, the thematic role that must exist is the patient which semantically needs to be generalized. This all stems from the meaning of the verb. The meaning of verbs can determine the syntactic and semantic structure. That way, children already know the meaning of verbs that affect sentence structure and the thematic roles of nouns. These findings draw on the development of psycholinguistics and cognitive development of children.

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