

Research Article

SIBLING EFFECTS ON CHILDREN'S BILINGUALISM

Aulia Apriana

Universitas Negeri Malang, Malang, Indonesia

Abstract.

It is believed that parents, especially mothers, are children's primary source of language exposure. Recent research suggests that siblings can also be a significant source of language exposure. However, studies on sibling effects on language acquisition and bilingualism are scarce. Therefore, advantageous to conduct a thorough investigation into sibling effects on children's bilingualism. In the form of library research, this study reveals that older siblings can significantly affect their younger siblings' language development because siblings spend plenty of time together while their parents are working or otherwise occupied. As a result, older siblings tend to act as caregivers for their younger siblings and serve as a vital source of language input. To conclude, older siblings can significantly influence their younger siblings' language acquisition and development because siblings' interactions can sometimes be very intense, which allows language transfer to happen.

Corresponding Author: Aulia Apriana; email: aulia.apriana.fs@um.ac.id

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bilingualism in the context of language acquisition is not a novel concept. However, debates and arguments about the strengths and weaknesses of a bilingual child continue to erupt among linguists and parents. Crystal (2003) is one of the linguists who believe that bilingualism harms language acquisition because bilingualism is caused by the brain's inability to process two language systems at the same time. As a result, bilingualism in a child will impede the acquisition of the child's first and second languages. On the other hand, Peal and Lambert studies (1962, cited in Steinberg, Nagata, & Aline, 2001) show a different phenomenon. They discovered that bilingual children outperform monolinguals in an intelligence test administered to 164 monolingual and bilingual children. The two researchers propose that the children's bilingual competence will improve their cognitive skills. In addition, Steinberg et al. (2001) also claim that children acquire languages better and quicker than adults because their brains and articulators are still absorbable and adaptable when learning new languages.

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Apart from the positive and negative impact of bilingualism on children's language acquisition, the sources of exposure, whether the children are exposed to the second language at home or outside the house, become a fascinating topic of investigation. Parents, particularly mothers, are usually considered children's primary source of language exposure. However, recent research suggests that siblings can also be an essential source of children's language exposure. This is why I am eager to research this topic for my dissertation to uncover the incredible process of language development of Indonesian bilingual children, mainly as a result of sibling effects. Unfortunately, even in the scope of international publications, studies on sibling effects on language development and bilingualism is still scarce. Furthermore, no research on this topic is available in the Indonesian context. Therefore, I believe that conducting this library research to investigate and gather the previous studies on sibling effects on language development and bilingualism is beneficial to build a solid theoretical foundation for my dissertation.

2. METHOD

The approach that I used for this research is library research, where I gathered some research articles and papers published in reputable journals. Still, I needed to expand the year of the publications because it was already tough to find research papers on this topic. The steps that I employed for my research are 1) selecting the topic, 2) identifying the keywords that described my topic, 3) looking for the background information, 4) using online databases to find books and research articles and papers, 5) reviewing the books and research articles and papers that are collected, 6) summarizing and writing the paper

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Even though research on sibling effects on children's language acquisition and development is not numerous, several studies on bilingual children have shown the impact of siblings on language acquisition and development (Caldas, 2006; Wang, 2008; Yip & Matthews, 2007). Their findings indicate that older siblings can significantly influence the language acquisition and development of their younger siblings because older siblings are more dominant in their interactions with their younger siblings. When the older siblings take over the conversation, they will demonstrate how to use specific words and their meanings, which their more youthful siblings will pick up on. This type of positive

sibling relationship can benefit people of all ages, from childhood to adolescence and adulthood. The siblings spend much time together when their parents are at work or otherwise occupied. As a result, older siblings are frequently relied upon to care for their younger siblings. This is in line with Zukow-Goldring (2002, cited in Bridges & Hoff, 2014), who mention that in certain cultures, older siblings play an important role in the upbringing of their younger siblings and become an essential source of language input for them.

Bridges and Hoff (2014) also conducted a more thorough investigation on the impact of older siblings on language use in bilingual households and the language development of bilingually developing children in those households. The first study investigated how an older sibling influenced children's exposure to and acquisition of English between the ages of 16 and 30 months. These toddlers grew up in homes where both English and another language were spoken. The second study examined the impact of having a school-aged older sibling in a separate sample of children aged 22 and 30 months who lived in bilingual Spanish-English homes. The parents were interviewed extensively about their children's home language use in English before they completed the MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventory (CDI), a standardized checklist of 100 everyday words for children aged 16 to 30 months. The results from Study 1 show that in bilingual families, toddlers use more English in their communication with their older siblings than in other family conversations. Therefore, toddlers with older siblings have a more advanced English vocabulary than toddlers without older siblings. However, because the difference in household language use between toddler homes with and without older siblings was not significantly different, it is possible that the effect of older siblings was not limited to English development but rather a more general result of older siblings boosting the language development of their younger siblings. The second study then answers this question by finding a significant difference in English usage between households with older siblings who attended school and families with no school-aged children. This study reveals that mothers with older children use more English than mothers who only have a toddler. This is in line with the study conducted by Wehberg et al., (2008), who claim that children with older siblings acquired more words than children without older siblings in a study on a group and individual variation in Danish children's first words using CDI.

In addition, according to Peyre et al. (2016), older siblings can significantly impact their younger siblings' language development because the quantity and quality of input received by children influence their language development significantly. Furthermore, many experts believe that older siblings' guidance can be very beneficial in increasing

the language development of young children (Hart & Risley, 1995; Ramírez-Esparza, García-Sierra, & Kuhl, 2017).

Another investigation was done by Havron et al., (2019) who perform a more in-depth analysis, including the age gap and gender as variables of interest. Their findings show that a larger age gap between siblings does not benefit the younger sibling's language development. This contradicts the findings of Zajonc and Markus (1975), who found that the older a sibling is, the greater their intellectual ability. Therefore the less disruptive they are to their younger siblings' development. Furthermore, Havron et al. (2019) discovered that children with an older sister performed better in the provided language test than children with an older brother. This is in line with Wehberg et al. (2008) that girls acquire language faster than boys, so when they develop into older siblings, they will serve as a very good source of language input for their younger siblings. Older sisters are more likely than older brothers to engage in positive and nurturing behavior (Blakemore, 1990; Tucker, McHale, & Crouter, 2001).

Another relevant research was done by Malmeer and Assadi (2013), who researched the effect of preschool-aged siblings on toddlers' language development. Their findings suggest that children with older siblings perform better in language comprehension than children who do not have older siblings. In language production, however, children without older siblings outperform those with older siblings. One possible explanation is that the children are accustomed to listening to and comprehending examples provided by their older siblings, and they then mimic them. As a result, these children excel at language comprehension. However, when it comes to producing utterances, they will encounter difficulties because the examples provided by their older siblings are usually relatively fast and complex, which differs from the clear and straightforward examples provided by their mothers.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

All of the aforementioned research articles and papers prove a powerful connection between older siblings and the language acquisition and development of their younger siblings. Most researchers believe that older siblings can significantly influence their younger siblings' language acquisition and development because siblings' interactions can sometimes be very intense, which allows language transfer to happen.

However, this paper still needs some improvement, especially in adding more recent publications on sibling effects on children's language acquisition and development.

The drawn conclusion is expected to be more valid and reliable by adding more recent research findings.

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