

MANDARIN SYNTACTIC DEVELOPMENT AMONG CHINESE CHILDREN IN MALAYSIA WITHIN AGES OF 2;3 TO 3;11 YEARS OLD

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This pioneer study was aimed to describe the syntactic development among Mandarin-speaking Chinese children with ages of 2;3 to 3;11 years old in Malaysia, specifically in the area of simple sentences, complex sentences, compound sentences and verb phrases produced. 50 subjects were involved in this study comprising of 5 girls and 5 boys in 5 age groups (2;3-2;5, 2;6-2;8, 2;9-2;11, 3;0-3;5 and 3;6-3;11). All of the subjects are residing in Klang Valley, and their dominant home language is Mandarin. Collection of language sample was done in 2 situations - free conversation (50 utterances) and story retelling. The language sample transcriptions were analyzed in terms of sentence structure and verb phrase structure. The mean length of utterances and the frequency of different types of sentence patterns and verb phrase patterns are enumerated and used in descriptive analysis by using the computer software SPSS. Results showed that 2-elements simple sentence are mostly produced, followed by 3-elements simple sentence. Productions of 4-elements simple sentence are limited. The pattern of simple sentence development is like a bell shape, where their production increases till age of 3, then it drops. Productions of complex and compound sentences are limited and they increase with age. The development of verb phrases is not significant across ages. Results revealed that the development of simple sentences, complex sentences and compound sentences and verb phrases in narrative are similar with those in free conversation. Results also showed that the mean length of utterances increased as age increases. From the findings, the 'meaningfulness and correctness of utterance structure' score have a significant positive relationship with age, and the mean length of utterances. The findings of this study can be used as a guide in developing assessment batteries of syntax for Mandarin speaking Chinese pre-school children in Malaysia.

Yeow, H.X. 2009. Mandarin syntactic development among Chinese children in Malaysia within ages of 2;3 to 3;11 years old. Bachelor of Speech Science thesis. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.