

Language Development in Arab Children

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Citation: Omar IBM. Language Development in Arab Children. *J Integrated Health* 2025;4(3): 395-397. DOI: doi.org/10.51219/JIH/omar-ibm/67

Received: 02 August, 2025; **Accepted:** 18 August, 2025; **Published:** 20 August, 2025

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1. Introduction

Communication development is a very important part of the human development. As the child grows older, s/he develops the ability to communicate. Verbal communication (represented by language), represents a major part of communication development. Language is a communication system used to share information with others (including ourselves as we do when we think in language¹ others may define language as a shared system of verbal symbols and rules that allow us to represent concepts and experiences to communicate with others².

Language is composed of five components. Phonology which concerned with speech sounds, morphology which is concerned with meaningful units, semantics or meanings, pragmatics or language use and finally the syntax which is mainly considered with grammar and sentence formation². Syntax involves word order rules, rules for combining word into phrases and rules for creating different types of sentences, such as questions and passive sentences². Syntax also considers the sentences from the perspective of their structures and functions³ which will be our concern in this study.

³Have revised how sentences are structured and what their function could be.

From the structure perspective, sentences could be divided into four structures, simple, compound. Complex and compound-complex. Simple sentence is the one that does not compose of (a clause with a syntactic function) in its components e.g. (a new car). A compound sentence Is the one that is formed by two simple sentences with a coordinator between them (and-or-but) e.g. (this is the room and this is the computer). Complex sentence is the one that have main clause and a subordinate clause with a syntactic function e.g. (I love this show because it is amazing).

The last structure is the compound-complex sentence which has two sentences compounded by a coordinator and at least on of them is a complex sentence e.g. (the man said that he will go to Riyadh because his father is sick).

Sentences' functions are illustrated as declarative (it is snowing), interrogative (do you like ice cream?), imperative (go home), exclamatory (what a big lion).

2. Literature Review

Learning the grammatical structure of language is a remarkable achievement in child language development that is not less important than learning the vocabulary. By 18-20 months of age, normal child is capable of producing his/her first two-word utterances. When the child is three years old, on average s/he capable of producing three-to-four-word utterances and as the child grows, the grammar grows too, ever increasing in the depth of sentence complexity and the breadth of its variety^{4,5}.

According to Brown⁶, children's syntactic development will pass through five stages of Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) development. The first stage (holophrastic), in which the child is using on word to express his needs and the second stage (joining stage), in which the child is joining two words together to communicate and this could be the start point of simple sentence appearance. By the age of three years, browns stated, that the children will be somewhere between stage 3(combining stage) and stage 4 (the recursive stage) and this is due to the individual differences between children. So, according to him, children at this age will begin to master word order at stage 3 and at the fourth stage the child will develop his/her first complex sentence that is the sentence with more than one clause. Stated that first complex sentence is produced by expanding the grammatical object as in [I see [you sit down]] and expanding the grammatical

subject will come later [[what you said] was bad]. Also, at that stage will rapidly learn grammatical morphemes, including conjunctions. So, at stage 4 the coordination of sentences (compound sentences) appears more frequently. Therefore, the child will be capable of coordinating words, phrases and clauses e.g. (gimme candy and chocolate and I give you kiss).

Other studies implies that children display the ability to produce complex sentences structures before their 3rd birthday⁷ and according to this, we expect to see various kinds of sentence structures (simple, compound and complex) in this study⁸, claims that children will not acquire all syntactic rules of their native language even at their 9 years of age.

In Arabic⁹ have provided a very interesting study about their two children's (Marwan and Dima) language development. They included in the study that the mastery of two-word utterances (beginning of simple sentences) were at the age 20-21 months. By the age of 2;1 year, their children started to produce compound sentences. Complex sentences appeared by the age of 2;6 years. ¹⁰Stated that children at the ages (3-4) years of age were using simple sentences in 54% of their speech and as children grow up, complex sentences are taking place until it reaches 45% of children's speech at the age (5-6) years. She also stated that children's ability to acquire language structure both in quantity and quality is not influenced by the socio-economic status of their parents.

Regarding the sentence function, ¹¹Found that children at Brown's stage 2, which may extend according to Brown even to the third birthday, from six languages expressed similar kinds of meanings. Utterances were used to locate or name objects and people, to request, to negate or indicate refusal or rejection, to express situations or events, to describe and finally to question with both wh-questions and yes/no questions. Therefore, in our study, if Arabic is the same with English, we will expect to see these kinds of functions in our sample of children between 3 and 4 years of age.

Halliday provided seven functions in his son Nigel's earliest language from other perspective as following, instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, heuristic, imaginative and informative¹².

In Arabic Abdo & Abdo showed that by the age of 2;7 months, their children have produced declarative, imperative, interrogative and negations in their sentences⁹.

3. Methodology

3.1. Subjects

The subjects participated in this study were (20) children (10) males (10) females aged from (3) to (4) Years old (see appendix 1 for exact age for each child) from different kindergartens in Amman and its suburbs (ten were recoded by our group and the other left ten were recorded by another group of master students from Jordanian university). These children, according to their caregivers, were normal clever and do not have any significant health problems or problems with socializing and interacting

with their peers in the kindergartens, also they belong to different classes of society. Children with language abnormalities or bilingualism did not participate in this study.

3.2. Stimuli

Samples were collected through playing and direct interaction between Children and examiners. Toys from the university center like (fire engine, wooden blocks, small cars and small characters), in addition for toys from the kindergartens themselves were used to elicit children's responses. Samples for non cooperative children were dismissed.

4. Procedures and Analysis

Data was collected using three kinds of recorders an MP3, Cassette recorder and an (I Mate) mobile with high quality recording. Samples were played by (real player media) and cassette recorder. Then they were transferred to papers and the whole examiners group took part in identifying the utterances. Both, the child and the examiner utterances were identified and written in order to know the context in which the utterances of the child were happened (see appendix 2). Then, children's utterances were discussed by the group regarding their structures and functions. Confrontational naming and yes/no question and their answer, unless they came in a natural context, were omitted but, open ended questions that were answered by one word were counted. Unclear and ambiguous utterances were discussed according to the number of agreed judges or listeners. Two of the cases were taken to our supervisor (Dr. Mousa Amayreh) to make sure of analysis accurateness. Finally, Children's utterances were written in a table in which each utterance was written then its structure and function consequently attached (see appendix 3).

5. Results

Speech samples were analyzed to determine the recurrence of each sentence type, with regard to sentence function and structure, then calculated and placed in (**Table 1**).

Then, the percentages of each type of sentence production were calculated and placed in (**Table 2**).

Further more, the mean of each type of sentence production (in percentage) for the whole 20 children was computed and placed in (**Table 3**).

With regard to sentence structure for children within the age range of three to four years old, the over all percentage of occurrence of simple sentences was 82.4% of their sentences. While the percentage for the compound sentence production was 19.1%. And the percentage of the complex sentences was 4.9%. The percentage for the compound/complex sentence production was 4%.

In so far as sentence function, the results exhibited the following percentages; declarative sentences 79.8%, interrogative sentences 7.8%, negation sentences 7%, imperative sentences 4.3% and calling .2%. Exclamatory sentences were absent form the speech sample collected for all subjects.

Table 3: Mean of each type of sentence production (in percentage) for the whole 20 samples.

Function of Sentence					Structure of Sentence			
calling	Negation	Imperative	Interrogative	Declarative	Compound Complex	Complex	Compound	Simple
0.2	7	4.3	7.8	79.8	0.4	4.9	19.1	82.4

6. Discussion

According to the results of this study, we observed higher percentages of simple sentences production for subjects at the age range between three to four years. In contrast, we have discovered that the production of compound and complex sentences was lower. With tendency of compound-complex sentences production to be very exceptional and this might be due to the acquisition of compound sentences is attained at the end of the second year of life or in the second half of the same year and this is in accordance to what Abdo and Abdo⁹ had reported. Furthermore, these results matched what Leopold⁷ stated in his study that children displayed the ability to produce complex sentences before their third birthday. Moreover, there is an agreement between the results of this study and this study and the results of Ismail¹⁰, in which she reported an increase in the number of simple sentences of children in the age range of three to four years although the percentage of these sentences was higher in this study.

With regard to sentence function, we have observed the increase of declarative sentences production in comparison to interrogative and negation. Whereas, calling sentences has rarely appeared in the production of children at this age range. While, exclamatory sentences have disappeared in the samples that we have collected and this might be attributed to the unfamiliarity between the examiners and the subjects, which resulted in the child addressing the questions of the examiner only or narrating stories though the questions were open ended. This might have caused an increase in the percentage of simple sentences production too.

7. Conclusions

From the results of this study, we can conclude the tendency of children three to four years old to utilize simple sentences more often than other forms of sentences, while they will still acquire other types of sentence forms such as compound, complex and compound-complex.

Results have shown the increase of declarative sentences production, with comparison to interrogative, imperative, negation, calling and exclamatory sentences. Though there was appearance of Wh- questions, but most of the interrogative sentences were expressed through yes or no questions. There was a manifestation of interrogative sentence use which was expressed via intonation. While, there was absence in the utilization of exclamatory sentences.

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