



## THE KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN'S SPEECH FUNCTIONS ACQUIRED THROUGH LEARNING EXPERIENCE (A CASE STUDY AT MONDIAL EDUCATION)

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengenai fungsi tuturan bahasa Inggris yang dikuasai oleh anak-anak taman kanak-kanak Mondial Education Semarang Tahun Ajaran 2012. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengungkap fungsi tuturan apa yang dikembangkan anak-anak tersebut melalui pengalaman belajar mereka dan bagaimana tuturan tersebut dihasilkan. Data penelitian ini dikumpulkan dengan mengamati dan merekam fungsi tuturan yang dihasilkan anak-anak melalui sejumlah kegiatan belajar mereka. Data yang direkam kemudian ditranskripsi berdasar giliran bicara untuk mengidentifikasi pengalaman belajar mereka dan mengkategorikan ujaran mereka berdasar model Kompetensi Tindak Tutur Celce Murcia (1995). Interpretasi temuan dilakukan dengan merujuk pada teori Akuisisi Bahasa Kedua, teori pelajar bahasa usia dini dan teori-teori lain yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan, anak-anak terlibat dalam sejumlah kegiatan belajar seperti drama, pusat matematika, pusat alam dan blok-blok permainan. Pengalaman belajar tersebut mendorong anak melahirkan ujaran-ujaran fungsi bahasa Inggris meliputi tujuh ranah kunci yakni pertukaran interpersonal, informasi, opini, perasaan, suasi, masalah dan skenario masa mendatang.

### Abstract

*This study is concerned with the speech functions acquired by kindergarten children through their learning experiences. The object of the study is the children of kindergarten level of Mondial Education Semarang in 2012 Academic Year. The goal of the study is to find out what speech functions are developed by the children through their learning experiences and how their utterances are generated. The data were collected by observing and recording the children's production of language functions in a number of activities of their learning experience. The recorded data were then transcribed based on turn to identify the learning experience and categorize the children utterances based on Celce-Murcia's (1995) proposed model of Actional Competence. The interpretation on the findings is conducted in the light of Second Language Acquisition, young learners and other relevant theories. The findings of this study show that the children were involved in a number of activities such as dramatic play, mathematic center, nature center and playing blocks. Those learning experiences have encouraged the children to produce utterances of language functions which cover seven key areas namely interpersonal exchange, information, opinions, feelings, suasion, problems and future scenarios.*

## INTRODUCTION

Amids the growing concern on poor quality education nationwide including the poor English proficiency of the people, there has been a quite interesting phenomenon in Indonesia lately where parents send their children to school earlier than ever before. Until two decades ago educated parents believed that four years old was the earliest age for children to go to school, but nowadays they might think it is too late. For this reason, probably, parents today send their two-years old children to school as early childhood education is offered nationwide. Some institutions offering early childhood education even implement immersion program where English is used as a medium of instruction.

This study is trying to critically perceive a phenomenon that parents wish their children master English as a foreign language in Indonesia. To make the dream come true, however, public schools nationwide do not support it due to the limited resources available. Early childhood education with immersion program introduced just recently in Indonesia seems to be an alternative option to address the issue.

It is likely that parents choose immersion schools as an alternative education to support their children to learn English since immersion environment has a beneficial factor of not only providing students with opportunities to reach academic achievement but also encouraging them to speak English from younger age. Teachers in immersion program deliver the same content of the subjects as other public school teachers do, but it is carried out in a different way in that they use English as a medium of instruction.

Given the background of the study above and the reasons for choosing this topic, the research questions of this study are: (1) What speech functions are developed by the kindergarten children of *Mondial Education* through their learning experiences? (2) How are their utterances generated in their learning experiences?

## METHODS

The study approach used in this research is a case study. Following this approach, it is decided to use observation on the children's learning experiences to collect the data. The participants of the study involve four to five year-old kindergarten students of *Mondial Education* Semarang, Indonesia.

Observations in this study were conducted over four weeks, three days a week and three

hours a day, during the children's entire kindergarten stay. Field notes have been taken in the form of running records, using pen and paper. The children and all the things that affected them in their environment were noted, including other people, objects, language, events and activities. I aimed to see how the children manage individual learning activities and how they play with others.

In order to describe the findings of this study the recorded data were transcribed based on turn. The description of the findings has been based on the suggested components of actional competence proposed by Celce-Murcia (1995). The interpretation of the findings is conducted in the light of Second Language Acquisition, young learners and other relevant theories.

In the light of Second Language Acquisition young learners and other relevant theories the interpretation of the findings is conducted. They include language acquisition models and theories, language environment and the individual, language acquisition and society.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that the four to five year old kindergarten students of *Mondial Education* acquired the knowledge of language functions categorized in seven key areas namely the interpersonal exchange, information, opinions, feelings, suasion, problems, and future scenarios which emerged in the learning process the children experienced during the observation conducted in this study.

The key area of interpersonal exchange includes greeting, making introduction and identifying oneself, extending, accepting and declining invitations and offers, making engagements, expressing and acknowledging gratitude, complimenting and congratulating, reacting to the interlocutor's speech, showing attention, interest, surprise, sympathy, happiness, disbelief and disappointment.

In the key area of information the children utterances include asking for and giving information, reporting (describing and narrating), remembering, explaining and discussing. The children produced utterances in the key area of opinions such as expressing and finding out about the opinions and attitudes, agreeing and disagreeing, approving and disapproving, showing satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

In a number of activities the children produced utterances categorized in the key area of feelings including expressing and findings out about feelings of love, happiness, pleasure, an-

noyance and surprise. In the key area of suasion the children managed to produce utterances such as suggesting, requesting and instructing, giving orders, advising and warning, persuading, encouraging, asking for, granting and withholding permission.

The children succeeded in producing utterances categorized in problems including complaining and criticizing, blaming and accusing, admitting and denying, regretting, apologizing and forgiving. The future scenarios as one of the seven categorized key areas of knowledge of language functions have been performed by the children by expressing and finding out about wishes, hopes, and desires, expressing and eliciting plans, goals, and intentions, promising, predicting and speculating, discussing possibilities and capabilities of doing something.

Each of the seven key areas above is represented by an example as follows:

#### **Interpersonal Exchange**

In terms of greeting, the children learned how to say hello to somebody or welcome them. They expressed it in a simple way as it is shown in Example 1.

##### **Example 1**

T: Good morning children?

S: **Good morning, Teacher.**

The children in the example above expressed greeting as a respond to their teacher. They needed to be stimulated by their teacher before their responding on such a greeting. The greeting expression "Good morning, Teacher" made by the children took place in a context where their class was about to begin. At this initial stage the activities was under the control of the teacher. As the activities were becoming a routine the children involved themselves in the conversation.

In this case, the teachers have helped the children learn the English language in the way that what they asked them to do is social as evidenced by the effort to give the children opportunities to choose what to say. In addition, the teachers have also helped the children learn the language by getting them to reflect on their learning. This initial process of learning English for children at this age is important since several studies have demonstrated that high-quality kindergarten programs have long-lasting positive effects on academic achievement.

Kindergarten is a critical year for all children. It is a year of transition from preschool programs or home to formal schooling. Most

children of kindergarten have curiosity, wonder, and enthusiasm to learn about themselves, others, and the world. The teacher's role and responsibility is therefore to nourish this hunger for knowledge, and to motivate and challenge the students, as well as to protect and nurture them.

The children were assisted to move beyond what they have shown they can do in everyday activities by having their learning scaffolded, using cultural tools, playing 'as if' they were someone or something else and in doing that they were adopting roles to match the rules they have generated. It is relevant to Vygotsky's theory of ZPD.

#### **Information**

Facts or details about something have also been the points of interest for children. Example 2 demonstrated how the children ask for and give information. The children here were capable of exchanging information.

##### **Example 2**

Ki : Its okay. The sun shine is a girls. What is the colour of sunshine?

Ka : Yellow

Ra : What is this, Miss?

Fa : Rabbit (letter R)

At : What is this, Faren?

Fa : This is space. Haidar this is the space or not? We will need it.

Referring to the way of asking for and giving information about facts or details about something in the examples above, it can be observed that the children tried to involve morphological aspect of language form. Morphology can be seen as connecting semantics and syntax. An important part of morphological development is understanding suffix 's' to indicate plural form and understanding how it can change the meaning and the grammatical function of a word.

Through these activities, the teacher helped the children learn language as what she implicitly asked them to do is asking questions appropriately. This approach seems to have emphasized on full of practice by visuals, realia, mime, gestures and body language. There was a lot of exposure to language in this context. What the teacher asked the children do was supported as there was constant repetition and recycling in different ways and in different contexts. In this context, the children were likely brought up and learned things about the world in a contributive social and linguistic environment for their English language development.

As Goh & Silver (2004) have pointed out,

the third component of language acquisition that needs to be considered is the contribution of environment, both social and linguistic. Social environment refers to the circumstances in which children are brought up and learn things about the world. Within this social environment, there is also the linguistic environment in which children interact with other people using language, receiving input, and getting explicit and implicit feedback on their language use.

### Opinions

We should not underestimate children's ability of expressing their feelings or thoughts about something or somebody, rather than a fact and the way that they think and feel about somebody or something; or the way that they behave towards somebody or something that shows how they think and feel. Example 3 shows how they make it happen. The children here were involved in exchanging information.

#### Example 3

Gab : A fish. Woo it's salty. Not so bad.. So much better now.  
 Ais :(cutting some fruits)  
 T :What is this chef? What do you want to cook gaby?  
 F : Wow this is so easy. I always go to kumon. I already make like this. I can't make butterfly like this. It is so easy. I am done.  
 A : I am not done yet

The above example shows that children also learn more about semantic relationship throughout preschool years. In Example 3, they managed to relate semantically the word 'fish' with the word 'salty'. The children's understanding of how words relate to each other begins to change. This process is known as the syntagmatic-paradigmatic shift. The young children learn a word with one specific meaning and tend to see that word within a simple syntactic relationship. The children most likely do not know terminology like 'noun' or 'verb' or 'adjective,' but they do know that some words are for people, places or things, that some words are for actions and that some words describe opinions and attitudes.

In this context the teacher used an approach by getting the children to reflect on their learning. Eliciting children's utterances and opinions can be a challenging activity. It was likely working, however, since it was not too challenging and the children were given a chance to work things out from what they know. The activity has

sparked interest and attention. It has led to success in expressing opinions and aroused curiosity. The children seemed to feel that the classroom activity was shared experiences and events. To this point, it is likely that the children increased in the length of utterances which is relevant to their language complexity.

As Goh & Silver (2004) have noted, there are two key questions to answer when we are discussing the children's language form development. First is how we gauge increasing language complexity in young children's speech production. Second, what are the main characteristics of morphological, syntactic and phonological development of English bilingual children by age 5. Researchers examine the increase in the length of the children's utterances to estimate language complexity of young English-speaking children. Mean Length of Utterance (MLU) is a method that can be used for charting the growing complexity in a child's language. The mean length of utterance is defined as average utterance length of English speaking preschoolers, measured in morphemes. An utterance is a unit of language separated from other units by a pause or a change in the pitch of the voice.

### Feelings

Children also experience the feeling of being slightly angry that they need to express as it is shown in Example 4. The children here were involved in exchanging information and services.

#### Example 4

Ber :Come on! Miss, Rafa don't want to stand up.  
 T :You dont want to tell the picture. OK you see first.  
 Ber : I have so many.  
 Kay : Like me this one is right.  
 Ki : Miss, Berlin erased that. I don't like her.

In spite of the fact that forms for negation and contradiction have emerged in the development of the children's language, the appropriateness of the subject and finite has not been taken into consideration. Instead of "Miss, Rafa doesn't want to stand up" the child said "Miss, Rafa don't want stand up." However, the message is still clear enough that the teacher could respond it by suggesting that Rafa should see first.

The children do not only need opportunities to try out and experiment with language but also feedback to confirm or modify their hypothesis. The child was trying to explain what was

happening on the white-board, where the teacher was concerned for the children to get the expression right. The children used complete phrases of language they have picked up from someone else, e.g. Come on!, I don't like her. These are sometimes called chunks of language because they are learned and used in speech as whole phrases. These ready-made bits of language help them to communicate when they have very little language.

The teachers seemed to provide young children with the language learning sources that enable them to interact with people and with expressive learning materials. As the previous study conducted by Guo (2011), getting involved in some activities was the most crucial point. The child under Guo's investigation substantiated his interests and took responsibility for his own learning. Most of the time, he ended up completing a task himself without communicating with others. The child responded to the teachers' queries and acted enthusiastically in teacher-organized activities. Every time a teacher made an attempt to interact with him, he responded in some form of language. The child seemed much more reactive to the teachers than to his English-speaking peers.

#### Suasion

Putting forward an idea or a plan for other people to think about has been acquired by children ranging from four to five years old in spite of simple expressions they make as they show in Example 5. The children here were involved in exchanging goods and information.

#### Example 5

Hai : I want orange juice  
 Key : Hey you should be a vegetable seller.  
       Miss Raihan Atala should be vegetable seller.  
 T : It is okay you can buy something,  
       the vegetable seller is hungry.  
 Gab : You should go to school !  
 Rai : I want this. I, I am first.  
 Ha : That's the people.

Referring to the above examples, it is reasonable to argue that language acquisition goes beyond just learning about grammar and vocabulary. In spite of their failure to construct grammatically perfect sentences the children in those examples learn to use the correct words and sentence forms to communicate a range of meanings in their interaction. In Example 5, they use language to express suggestions by saying 'You should speaking English' instead of 'You should speak English'. In addition, they need to interpret

other people's message. They perform their ability to use language effectively to fulfill functions and goals. They acquire pragmatic competence in the social contexts they participate in.

The use of modality "should" by the children indicates that their pragmatics competence is developing. To some extent, they managed to suggest or request someone else to do something politely. The children were likely to engage in an interesting activity as they talked their heads off happily. It means that the children got plenty of practice in using the language. This may be the reason why the children seemed to do better than adults. They have strong desire to communicate. They immediately try to use the new language and so get more practice, whereas adults usually want to study it formally in classroom first.

It seemed that the way the children approached the learning of English as a foreign language and their ability to interact with others is different from one to another due to social, aptitude, psychological, and environmental factors. As the previous study conducted by Clarke & Milne (1996) which show that a number of factors make a difference to the way children approach the learning of a second language and their ability to interact with others. These factors include: (1) social factors – some children are more outgoing and are risk takers (2) aptitude factors – some children have more ability as second language learners; (3) psychological factors – some children are more motivated to learn the second language or their personality affects the way they approach the task; (4) environmental factors – the way the environment is set up and managed, the inclusive nature of the program, the range of resources available, the way staff support children to interact with others.

#### Problems

To say that you are annoyed, unhappy or not satisfied about somebody or something proves to be the necessity of children their communication. They realize it in a way as it is shown in Example 6. The children here were involved in exchanging information and services.

#### Example 6

Ber :Come on! Miss, Rafa don't want  
       to stand up  
 T :You dont want to tell the picture.  
       OK you see first.  
 Ki : Miss Berlin erased that. I don't like her.  
       Ber & Kay: I am sorry Kirana.

Ga : Like this?  
 Ka : You play with me. Miss, Rafi don't  
       want play with me.  
 T : Why?  
 Ka : I don't know

Fa : We gonna make more bigger.  
       Make many.  
 Ga : Sorry.  
 Fa : See! Be carefull. It is not strong.  
       I don't give this one.

The conversations above show that the children learn important skills such as turn-taking through shared action sequences known as 'joint action' from young age. The conversation took place in familiar contexts and it is therefore providing them with important support for language acquisition. Their language acquisition has gone beyond just learning about grammar and vocabulary. They have used language to criticize and to make complain.

Setting up the conditions which enable children to learn is important and a teacher has an important role in creating these conditions and then managing what goes on. In this context, it is likely that there was positive teacher-students relationships and learning environment. The children and the resources were organized effectively. The communication between the teacher and the children was effective. There was also appropriate support for children's language learning. The learning materials and resources were interesting and stimulating.

It seemed that the children know that the world is governed by rules to be obeyed despite that they do not always understand the rules. It is in line with the remark made by Scott & Ytreberg (2006) that young language learners know that the world is governed by rules. They may not always understand the rules, but they know that they are there to be obeyed, and the rules help nurture a feeling of security.

#### Future Scenarios

Expressing a desire of a feeling that you want to do something or have something and expressing a belief that something you want will happen as well as expressing a strong wish to have or do something requires high nature of imagination. The children have taken the risks of realizing it as it is shown in Example 7. The children here were involved in exchanging information and goods.

#### Example 7

Fa : My robot is bigger  
 Ga : This one!  
 Fa : Can you get me two more, gany?  
 Ga : This is for here. I think I have here.  
 Fa : We gonna make ...(robot name).  
       One hundred meters  
 Ga : Ohhh no! What is that

Example 7 shows that the child has over-generalized the English grammar. Instead of saying "We gonna make a bigger one" the child expressed his intention by saying "We gonna make more bigger." This generalization could be deemed as a hallmark of linguistic rule learning rather than the child's regressing in his language acquisition.

It seemed that the teacher in this context was conscious that the children learn most effectively when they were involved and the way she took was organizing language learning which built on the children's interests through topic work. Topic work here refers to a way of organizing children's learning and language learning around topics or themes of interest to the children. In this context the topic work is making robots.

The children were very quick to know how they have been labeled or assessed by their teachers. As Moon (2000:29) has argued, teachers are likely to have views and prejudices about what children should be like as pupils. Teachers also have views about how individual children will perform in class because of what they know about their backgrounds or previous experience. If they think a child is clever, they will ask more challenging questions. If they think a child is weak, they will tend to give him/her more support in answering. The children then begin to behave as their teacher expects them to, and so they end up becoming successful or failing according to the teacher's expectations. This in turn affects their self-image or concept that is how they feel about themselves.

## CONCLUSION

The speech functions acquired by the kindergarten children of *Mondial Education* through their learning experiences include the knowledge of language functions categorized in seven key areas namely interpersonal exchange, information, opinions, feelings, suasion, problems, and future scenarios.

The utterances produced by the children were generated by questions and comments made by their teachers as the children participated in their very purposeful play and learning tasks. As their language developed, however, the children were given a chance to work things out from

what they know. The children were encouraged to co-operate, respect and help each other. The classroom activities were then felt as shared experiences and events.

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