THE ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF *MONDIAL SCHOOL* KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN

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Abstrak

Studi ini berkaitan dengan perkembangan bahasa pada siswa Modial Kindergarten dengan mempertimbangkan beberapa aspek kemampuan alami dan pengingat siswa yang membantu untuk mempelajari Bahasa Inggris. Data diperoleh melalui rekaman siswa saat pembelajaran di kelas. Setelah dikoleksi, data dianalisa dengan mentranskrip ekaman berdasar urutan dan menginterpretasikan untuk mengetahui perkembangan bahasa anak. Temuan studi menyarankan bahwaanak-anak dan dewasa bukan patner yang ideal dalam conversation. Hasil menunjukan bahwa anak-anak menggunakan bahasa scara kreatif, mereka bereksperimen dengan bahasa yang terpikir dalam kepala mereka secara tidak sadar yang mnunjukan bahwa siswa tidak hanya bereksperimen dengan bahasa tapi juga memmbutuhkan feedback untuk mengkonfirmasi hipotesis mereka.

Abstract

This study deals with the language development of Mondial kindergarten learners of English by considering some of the natural abilities and characteristics children possess which help them to learn English as a foreign language. The data is collected by recording the students' utterances during several learning experiences and activities in the classroom. The data collected is then analyzed by transcribing those utterances based on turn and move before identifying and interpreting them to reveal the children's English language development. The findings of this study suggest that adults and children are not equal conversation partners. In the beginning, adults do most of the talking during pretend plays and other activities. But as children develop greater control over language structures and vocabulary, they also play a bigger role in initiating and maintaining interaction. The data shows that children use language creatively. Students try to experiment and work out the rules of the language in their heads, though they may not be aware of doing this. One implication is that children need opportunities to try out and experiment with language, but they also need feedback to confirm or modify their hypothesis.

INTRODUCTION

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 address the issue.

In this study, children's learning experiences at school which can support their learning process of developing their English speaking skills will be the focus. It is inspired by Pinter's (2006) argument that children have different way from adults in learning something, especially language. She argued that they like playing and do everything unscheduled in the process of teaching and learning and they also learn language in abstract ways, whereas adults can understand language features based on their knowledge and do everything scheduled.

It is likely that parents choose immersion school as an alternative to education to support their children for learning English since immersion environment has benefit factor of not only providing students with opportunities to reach achievement in their education 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 different way in that they use English as a medium of instruction.

So, this study was initiated by the problems faced by parents in Indonesia in choosing the best education for their children in terms of academic and introducing English from early age. It is inspired by a point of view that the introduction of the English language after age puberties is considered too late to master the language proficiently. It is in line with critical period hypothesis cited by Pinter (1967), suggesting that brain plasticity was only conducive to language learning until puberty".

In other words, this study deals with learning experience's contribution in developing children's English speaking skills. It is inspired by an experience to visit an immersion school at Semarang, Indonesia, where the students speak English despite the absence of their teacher. They speak English fluently to each other in every situation, including in sport class where students speak English with each other and the teacher explained the rules of the game using the same language. How can the students in that school speak English fluently in such a young age while the number of Indonesian people who can use English with any real fluency remains low although it has been regarded as the first foreign language since the 1950s?

It is believed that young age learners can acquire language faster than the older ones (Krashen, 1970). It is line with critical period hypothesis cited by Rod Ellis (2006: 67) suggesting that there is a period during which language acquisition is easy and complete (i.e. native-speaker ability is achieved) and beyond which it is difficult and typically incomplete. He said that people who lost their linguistic capabilities, for example as a result of an accident, were able to regain them totally before puberty (about the age of twelve).

It is likely the reason why some parents in Indonesia decided to send their children to early childhood education with immersion program where English is used as a medium of instruction. It is an important decision. However, what sort of learning experience in such a program that contributes most in developing the children English speaking skills is more important issue to explore.

The issue of learning experience which contributes in developing children's English speaking skills has something to do with how learners learn a language or the process of second language learning. Jack C. Richards (2006: 4) pointed out that such a process has changed considerably in the last 30 years and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is partly a response to these changes. He noted that earlier views of language learning focused primarily on the mastery of grammatical competence, emphasizing activities such as memorizing dialogs and performing drills.

In addition, learning experience has also something to do with the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. Jack C. Richards (2006: 4) argued that CLT began a movement away from traditional lesson formats toward the use of pair work activities, role plays, group work activities and project work.

In this study, attention will also be focused on the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. Observation will be conducted on whether traditional lesson formats is dominant or it uses pair work activities, role plays, group work activities and project work. In this way, the students' learning experience can be identified and whether it contributes in developing their English speaking skills can be revealed.

Given the background of the study above

and the reasons for choosing this topic, the research question of this study is "How do kindergarten children in *Mondial School* develop their English speaking skills?"

METHODS

This study is conducted by observing and recording the children's utterances in English as they involved in pretend plays and other activities in the classroom of Mondial School Semarang, Indonesia. The children's age ranges from four to five-year-old. The analysis of the data started with transcribing the recorded data based on turn and move. The transcriptions were then analyzed to reveal the speech acts and the length of the utterances produced to figure out the language development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data collected in this study, it is reasonable to argue that children make major achievements in their language development within a short span of four or five years. During these early years of their lives, they acquire the basic structure of their language and also learn about how language functions in social contexts. As their vocabulary grows at a daily rate of about five words, they also gradually develop a deepening understanding of how some of these words relate to others. They use these newly acquired words to express concepts they have developed and to ask questions about the world around them.

Children's desire to communicate is very powerful and this carries over into foreign language learning. If they are engaged in an interesting activity, they will *talk their heads off* happily. This is very useful for language learning because it means that students will get plenty of practice in using the language. This may be one reason why in natural situations, children often seem to do better than adults, i.e., their strong desire to communicate means that they immediately try to use the new language and so get more practice. Adults usually want to study it formally in classroom first. We need to think how to activate this desire in the foreign language classroom through the teaching methods and resources we use.

It is revealed that adults and children are not equal conversation partners. In the beginning, adults do most of the talking during play and care-giving routines. But as children develop greater control over language structures and vocabulary, they also play a bigger role in initiating and maintaining interaction. The example below shows how the children initially take part in an interaction.

Example 1
T : Can you tell me what day is today?
S : Monday
T : Monday? That's true. Today is Monday. What does Monday start with?
S : M
T : Now, how is outside?
S : Sunny day
T : OK. Sunny day means that the sun shinning brightly. So, somebody can help me to draw Mister Sun?
S : Me!

The example above clearly shows that the teacher do most in talking while the children response shortly with one or two words. However, Example 2 below indicates that as children develop greater control over language structures and vocabulary, they also play a bigger role in the interaction. The children also use a variety of strategies to learn a foreign language. The children make use of ready-made phrases of language.

Example 2
(Teacher devided students into some groups to pretend some situation in restaurant, fruit store, and vegetable store).
Gaby : A fish. Woo, it's salty. Not so bad. So much better now.
Teacher : What is this, Chef? What do you want to cook, Gaby?
Gaby : What do you want? Mango or strawberry?
Raihan : I want orange juice
Kay : Hey, you should be a vegetabe seller. Miss Raihan Atala should be vegetable seller.
Teacher : It is okay. You can buy something. The vegetable seller is hungry.
Raihan : What is this?
Gaby : This is crab.

The example above suggests that children learning foreign language often use complete phrases of language they have picked up from someone else, e.g., *What do you want?, Not so bad, So much better now, I want orange juice.* These are sometimes called chunks of language because they are learned and used in as whole phrases. Children may not have been taught these chunks formally, but they help them to communicate when they have very little language. Later they

may begin to break down these phrases and re-combine the words in new ways. For example, in the beginning a child may just use the phrases *What do you want*. Later he/she may begin to realize that this can be combined with other parts of the phrase, *e.g., What do you want to buy?, What do you want me to do?*. Later he/she may begin to change other parts of the phrase, *e.g., What does he want?*, *What do they want?* and at a later stage he/she may begin to realize that the verb common changes according to the subject, *e.g., He doesn't want to buy anything*. It is useful to observe when children begin to break down a phrase in this way as this is a sign of language development. We can help to encourage this by getting children to notice common or recurring elements in phrases.

Teaching children chunks may be very helpful in the early stages of language learning to enable them to take part in conversation. They can take over and use for themselves ready-made bits of language so that they can join in. By joining in, they get more exposure to input for language learning and more practice. The use of songs, rhymes, poems, drama and classroom routines all help to give children access to ready-made bits of language so they can begin to communicate.

Dialogue is inherently interactive in that it typically does not involve simply one move from one speaker. After one speaker has initiated an exchange, another speaker is very likely to respond. Example 3 shows that the children use at least four basic move types of statement, question, offer and command. The move sequences can be described with a list of eight speech function classes: question, disclaimer, answer, statement, acknowledgement, contradiction, offer, accept, command, compliance.

Example 3
T   : Do you know the taste of milk? (question)
S   : Very nice and sweet. (answer)
T   : How with potato chip? (question)
S   : Salty (answer)
T   : Can you say something else that taste salty? (answer)
Ha   : Pepper. (answer)
Gab : Pepper is hot. (contradiction)
Fa   : Paprika? (offer)
T   : Paprika is hot. (contradiction)
       How about soup? (offer)
       Soup is salty. (statement)
Fa   : Yummy, you know. (acknowledgement)

Having established a basic picture of how dialogue works above we can recognize a correlation between the semantic choice of speech function and grammatical structure which is typically chosen to encode it.

In terms of sentence types (declarative, imperative, interrogative and exclamative) the children begin to use the first three types of adult sentence forms regularly. A declarative sentence consists of a subject followed by a verb, and often includes an object or a complement. As shown in Example 4, early two-word-utterances are often declarative in form. Example 5 illustrates the declarative form of subject-verb-object/complement that emerges. In spite of the absence of grammar words such as 'for' and 'to' respectively, the declarative form is unmistakable in each utterance.

Example 4
Gaby   : What do you want?
Raihan : I want orange juice

Example 5
Teacher : There will be four teachers. Who will be the teachers?
Berlian : Me !
Teacher : Ber, Far, Gab,Ray.
Key   : I don't want be students.

The development of interrogative forms in English also follows a predictable sequence. It is first signaled by intonation and subsequently progresses to more sophisticated constructions that involve the inversions of sentence elements. The development of 'wh' questions is particularly fascinating. Children first ask questions by adopting a rising tone. This occurs as early as the emergence of single-word utterance (Example 6). When children progress to tw-word utterances, intonation is still used for signaling a question. The word 'what' is generally the first 'wh' word to appear, although at this stage, children are most likely using it as part of a set of formulaic expressions (Example 7).

Example 6
Teacher : The restaurant sells seafood.
Raihan : The crabs?

Example 7
Raihan : What's this?
Gaby   : This is crab

The words 'where' and 'who' also appear at around the same time and continue to be used in diverse ways (Example 8). These two 'wh' words refer to objects, events, people or things that are a part of a child's immediate world and are part of their concrete knowledge.

Example 8

Gaby : This ! Who want juice strawberry or apple?
Who want juice strawberry? Who want juice strawberry?
Come here. Sit on your chair.
Raihan : Hi, Gaby
Gaby : Strawberry or orange?
Raihan : Ooohhh, I want grape. Where is the food?

Imperative sentences typically include a verb phrase at the beginning of an utterance. Its functions range from polite request to demands and commands. Example 9 shows the children under the investigation use one of the types of imperatives statement.

Example 9

Ais : This is my mom miss and this is my dad. And this my dog. I have five dogs
Fais : Haidar, tells about your family.
Haidar : This is me.

Semantic development is characterized by the acquisition of vocabulary and the ability to understand interrelationships between words and their relationships to abstract concepts. When children begin to acquire vocabulary, they store and use words as distinct, unique units of meaning. The meaning children assign to a word is determined by the context in which it is first encountered, and this will influence how they subsequently use the word. Example 10 shows how meaning the children assign to the words they utter.

Example 10

T : What Is that?
Far : Chocolate.
T : Do you know the taste?
Far : Salty.
T : Is it salty?
S : No, Sweet.

Children acquire pragmatic competence in the social contexts they participate in, particularly during conversations with adults. Children learn important skills such as turn-taking shared action sequences known as 'joint action' from a young age. They also learn to express basic pragmatic intentions, such as requests and refusals (known as *speech acts*) in these familiar contexts and with familiar conversation partners, who are usually the parents or other main caregivers. Example 11

shows how the children have acquired the pragmatic competence. Such a competence are also demonstrated in the list of utterances in Example 12.

Example 11

Faren : Can you get me two more, gaby? This is for here.
Gaby : I think I have here.

Example12

1. Hey you should be a vegetabe seller.
2. Miss Raihan atala should be vegetable seller.
3. You should go to school
4. Can I have crab and corn?
5. Dont broke the window
6. Kiki, I want you to tell me about your family
7. OK you see first.
8. Sit down first
9. Kiki stand up
10. You should speaking english dont say "seorang"

CONCLUSION

It is reasonable to argue that language form, semantic and pragmatic developments are inter-related and equally important to overall language development. The children learn to respond appropriately to different types of question. Their deepening understanding of interrogative terms also enables them to produce these questions. This further facilitates their semantic development and increases their pragmatic sophistication in a spiraling manner. Also, as children gain increasing control of language form, they can devote more attention to how to use language to achieve pragmatic ends.

Children are naturally curious and active. Children use a variety of strategies to learn a foreign language. Children are able to draw on many of the abilities which they have made use of in learning their first language. Children have a good instinct for interpreting the sense or meaning of a situation. Teaching children chunks may be very helpful in the early stages of language learning to enable them to take part in conversation. Children have a great capacity to enjoy themselves. When they are enjoying themselves, they are usually absorbed by the activity and want to continue with it.

The implication is that children need opportunities to try out and experiment with language, but they also need feedback to confirm or modify their hypothesis.

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