

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION**

This chapter concludes the investigation of this study by giving an overview of the processes that have taken place, the research questions and methodology, the findings, and the implications.

#### **5.1 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH**

The journey of this study started with a pilot study of a subject named James (J) who displayed similar characteristics and background as Y's. They were about the same age, same level of language ability, similar interest ( both liked to talk about places); and had received early intervention programs. Two speech samples were collected from J in two different contexts ( at his home and a restaurant ); and findings from the pilot study showed that J had pragmatic deficits in his daily conversations. This finding had inspired the researcher to pursue a similar study on Y.

Y was chosen as a candidate because he had verbal skills, able to read and write and was approachable. Fourteen speech samples were collected from Y at different times and in different contexts such as at his home, at the airport, at the school, at the therapist's place and at a peer's home (at Ahmad's house). The purpose of these recordings was to see if there would be any variations in his speech when he was placed in different

environments and with different people. Some of the recordings were videotaped and some were audiotaped. The researcher also employed different strategies to obtain speech samples from Y such as using storybooks, travel brochures, and television documentary. In addition, different contacts were engaged in this research such as his school teachers, his therapists, his parents and his peer (Ahmad). The data were collected from 2004 to 2008 using a video recorder and audio recorder. The interview technique was used with his parents and teachers to gauge information about Y's behaviours and habits; his early diagnosis; the intervention programs that Y had gone through and their perspective of Y's condition. The interview was carried out casually throughout this study in order to create a friendly atmosphere between the researcher and the parents. Since this study took four years, it was necessary to keep the relationship with the subject and his family warm and lasting.

## **5.2 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

The presentation of this study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One explicates the background of this study (for example, a scenario of the awareness of autism in Malaysia, the services available and previous studies related to autism); the statement of the problem, research questions, and objectives of the study. There are three research questions in this study which revolved around the theme of pragmatic abilities and conversational skills. The questions are (1) how does the subject communicate with people in his immediate environment? (2) does the subject observe or violate the Grice's theory? (3) how does the subject communicate in different domains example, home,

school and community places?. In addition, this chapter includes discussion of pragmatic abilities and explanation of key terms used in this study.

Chapter Two presented literature review of this topic and other related studies. This chapter explicates conversational skills of normal and language disordered people, conversation analysis (CA), pragmatic disabilities, autism, and conversational skills of people with autism. Many sources were sought to facilitate the various aspects of this study and they were elaborated in this chapter. The following chapter explicates the Methodology and the procedures of the research. It describes the presentation of the data, the qualitative approach, research design, theoretical framework, instruments of the study, the background of the subject and the pilot study. Next, the researcher also discussed the three theories that were used as a framework for this study namely Grice's theory, SSJ model and LPA.

Finally, Chapter Four presents the analysis of the data collected. The outcomes of this analysis were presented according to the objectives stated in the first chapter.

## **5.3 REFLECTION OF THE FINDINGS**

### **5.3.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The following discussion recap the four objectives and significance that can be drawn from them.

The first objective was to analyze the subject's conversational skills according to Grice's theory. The findings showed that the subjects observed and violated some of Grice's maxims of conversation (maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manners). Refer to 4.1. He was especially diligent with the maxim of quality which states that one must not lie or say something that one has no knowledge of. Since Y is autistic and a very straightforward person, he is an honest and sincere character. Although his utterances were brief and inadequate but they were truthful and relevant. Most of what he said observed the maxim of relation if one analyzes the implied message carefully. This maxim enables analysts to clarify many ambiguities in Y's utterances. People always make judgment based on what they hear (linguistic meaning) not what is implied (speaker meaning). This had impacted Y's social skills because he had little opportunity to socialize as most of the time he was not included in group activities. Many of Y's utterances were misinterpreted or considered ambiguous due to the lack of understanding on the part of the hearer. The concept of implicature from Grice provided a platform to justify awkwardness Y's utterances. At the end of this analysis, it is concluded that Y in general was able to observe the three maxims of conversation proposed in Grice's theory but violated the third maxim of manner.

The second objective was to analyze the subject's conversational skills according to the SSJ model. This model lists the actions that take place in a conversation; but, only six noticeable actions were discussed in this study. They were turn-taking, adjacency pair, overlapping, topic maintenance, latching and repetition. The findings from this analysis reflect that Y carried out these actions but in an awkward manner, for example, he used repetition as a strategy to do turn-taking and to initiate conversation. His continuous

repetition were used to manipulate the direction of the conversation towards his interest. In addition, Y was not able to perform adjacency pairs and topic maintenance. His utterances did not generate more relevant utterances because they were brief and ambiguous. Next, Y also had problem staying on a topic, for example, in T4 which had 28 exchanges, he changed the topic six times. This phenomenon occurs in many autistic children due to their attention deficit.

The third objective was to analyze the subject's conversational skills according to LPA. This assessment explicates elements of pragmatics that are typically missing or to be observed in children with language disorder such as autism, Down syndrome and ADD (attention deficit disorder). There were nine major questions in this analysis (refer 4.3.). Y's evaluation showed that he has deficit in the pragmatic aspect. He has sufficient linguistic knowledge but lacks of knowledge in language usage. The evaluation from LPA concluded that Y needs a language improvement program to enhance his language ability and vocabulary expansion.

Finally, the fourth objective was to provide a descriptive chart of the subject's pragmatic skills based on Grice's theory. The purpose was to conceptualize Y's pragmatic skills in a graphic form. These diagrams will help the reader to obtain a quick overview of Y's conversational skills.

This reflection of the findings concludes that many misunderstandings toward Y are due to the society's preconceived idea about people with mental disability. People always assume that the utterances produced by children with autism are unintelligible or

irrelevant. This misconception has deprived many autistic children like Y the opportunity to communicate their feelings effectively and the opportunity to expand their language.

### **5.3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

At the beginning of this study, three research questions (RQ) were formulated to guide the direction of this investigation. The research questions were: (1) how did the subject interact with people in his immediate environment based on the data collected? (2) did the subject observe or violate Grice's maxims of conversation? and (3) how did the subject communicate in the following situations:

- (i) Home – ex. With his parents and siblings
- (ii) School – ex. with his teachers and peers, and therapists.
- (iii) Community \_ ex. at the playground, restaurants

For RQ 1, this study found that the subject interacts with people in his immediate environment using verbal mode and proximity. For example, when he is requesting to go somewhere, he would come close to his father and mother and repeated the name of the place that he wanted to go (refer to T10, he requested to go to the airport) incessantly. Y would look into the face of his hearer when he wanted some response. Y also utilized paralinguistic behaviours such as gaze and hand movement when he interacts with other people. This style is consistent with everybody he speaks to regardless of the contexts. For RQ2, does he observe or violate Grice's maxims of conversation? Generally, he observes Grice's theory (refer 4.1.1). The adherence of the four maxims are displayed in his speech.

Although sometimes he violates some of the maxims, but a major portion of it is adherence. RQ3 asks how Y communicates at home, school and in community place such as at the playground and at the restaurant. For this question, Y did not show any variation in these different contexts. Y conversational style is constant whether he is at home, in school or in community places. He speaks of the same topic and repeats persistently. There is no variation in his speaking style.

#### **5.4 IMPLICATIONS**

Findings from this study have generated the following implications:

1. The awareness that children with autism need to be taught the appropriate conversational skills to help them improve their social skills and be able to integrate into the society. Studies in pragmatics have shown that the ability to use language in context is a major problem faced by these children although they possess linguistic ability. For example, they do not know how to start a conversation and they do not have the knowledge of proximity. They often come too close to their conversational partner, they step into a conversation abruptly and they do not pay attention to the current discussion. These are among the aberrant behaviours of autistic children which are different from the behaviours of children with other mental disabilities. This knowledge of how autistic children communicate and behave is very important to teachers who are teaching children with ASD. Therefore, providing special education teachers with specific skills to handle autistic children warrants immediate attention.

2. The importance of incorporating a language remediation program in the curriculum for special needs students. Currently, this is not included in the special education program run by the government. The present curriculum focuses on academic excellence and vocational training. They fail to realize that conversational skill is more important because it is the major problem faced by children with autism. Without the ability to communicate, they cannot express themselves appropriately and therefore, will not be able to join in the society in future. These children will grow up to be adults and will have to do many chores such as going to the supermarket, the bank and the bookstore on their own. Therefore, they need language to communicate in these situations.

3. The need for teachers to provide many opportunities for ASD children to perform speech acts. These opportunities can be provided by creating contexts for the children to communicate such as by asking open questions ( for example. “Who wants to help?”. “What can I do for you?”) or by giving them a task that requires verbal and non-verbal signals. The findings also show that teachers need to learn the various ways generating conversations with ASD children for example, using comics, movies, documentary programs and travel brochures. These activities will expand their vocabulary and boost their confidence to speak.

4. The need to organize more autism awareness campaigns to educate the public and the authorities about the implications of this syndrome. Autism is a life-long illness that can cause huge psychological and financial burdens to the sufferers and families of those affected by ASD. In advanced countries such as the United States and Britain, the



governments allocated huge budget on providing services for their citizens affected by ASD. These governments consider caring for autism sufferers as national responsibility.

## **5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

During the course of this study, several possible topics have emerged and could be expanded into further research. They are discussed here for future researchers who are keen in pragmatics and autism:

1. Firstly, the current topic could be extended to a larger group of autistic teenagers. This would provide a wider coverage of pragmatic skills that were not shown by the subject of this study. In addition, it would produce completely different findings and a broader view of the problems faced by teenagers with autism.
2. Secondly, this study could be applied to ASD teenagers who come from lower income group and did not experience early intervention programs. Would this group have lower linguistic skills and would they have a more serious pragmatic disorder?
3. Thirdly, other research may include the semantic aspect of language because many autistic children face problem in understanding meanings of words. This disorder has a bearing on the child's pragmatic performance.
4. Fourthly, this study could be extended to designing intervention programs for teachers to improve the conversational skills of children with autism in Malaysian schools.

The special education program that Y is attending currently and previously did not have such programs to improve the children's conversational skill.

5. Finally, future study could explore social skills training (McTear, 1985). It is concerned with how the skills of face-to-face interaction may be improved. These skills are necessary because autistic adolescents will grow up and need to have a vocation. They need to learn how to communicate with people at the workplace, social places like the bank, post office and supermarket. These are the places that they will frequent when they become independent adults.

In a nutshell, there are many extensions of research that could be generated from this study. Only topics related to pragmatics and conversational skills are highlighted here because of its importance to the future development of the autistic teenagers.

## **5.7 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY**

In this chapter, an overview of the study and some directions for future research have been given. First, some theoretical frameworks on autism, conversational skills and the reflection of the findings were reviewed. A discussion on pragmatic disabilities and the assessment for identifying this disability (LPA and Grice's theory) were also included in this chapter.

Next, this chapter concerned the implications of this study on children with autism. Several suggestions have been put forward to help improve the current situation and

services for children with autism. Since communication problem is the trademark of these children, this issue was highlighted in this concluding section. This study proposes that language remediation programs to be included in the special needs curriculum.

Finally, pragmatic abilities and conversational skills are closely-related and have a bearing on each other. This study has attempted to show how the lack of pragmatic knowledge can impair a person's ability to express his intentions and cause him frustration. The most important consideration should be that our greater understanding of how children with autism communicate can help improve their chances to have better quality of life.