

**CONVERSATIONAL TOPICS OF  
URBAN MALAYSIAN PRESCHOOLERS**

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**FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS  
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA  
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URBAN MALAYSIAN PRESCHOOLERS**

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**FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS  
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## ABSTRACT

The central aim of this study is to identify the conversational topics of urban Malaysian preschoolers. Using quantitative and qualitative approaches, this descriptive study elicited data from an urban, English medium child care and development centre, which provided two groups that comprised 18 preschoolers of Chinese, Malay, Indian and Punjabi descent. A compact digital camera with video recording function was used to record the preschoolers' reading time, activity time, drawing time, playtime and mealtime conversations on a first-hand basis for four consecutive days and on two separate occasions – September 2009 and March 2010. These conversations yielded 26 clips totalling four hours, 10 minutes and five seconds, from which a total of 2626 lines of utterances were coded according to the 48 topic categories that make up the referential frames of Time, Person and Content. The overall findings indicate that preschoolers talked primarily about the present (31.6%), non-human subjects (11.6%) and themselves (11.1%), which concurs with the study of Marvin, Beukelman, Brockhaus and Kast (1994). Data showed that the 10 most popular topics of conversation were about the present time, non-human subjects, themselves, their peers, the actions and personal information of themselves and others, being playful, movies/cartoons, descriptions, space and toys. The present study sheds light on the conversational competence of urban Malaysian preschoolers, particularly their selection and elaboration of conversational topics. As this knowledge provides an insight of their linguistic, cognitive, psychological and social development, it is useful in the crafting of a preschool curriculum that is relevant, engaging and stimulating. It may also aid parents, child care professionals, educators in the building and maintenance of their interpersonal relationships with preschoolers. Additionally, it may be used as a yardstick to diagnose difficulties in oral language development among preschoolers and in the devising of a system to assist children with expressive communication disorders.

**Keywords:** Urban Malaysian preschoolers, conversational topics, referential frames

## ABSTRAK

Tujuan utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengenalpasti topik-topik perbualan kanak-kanak prasekolah bandar di Malaysia. Kajian deskriptif ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif untuk menganalisa data yang diperolehi daripada sebuah pusat penjagaan dan pembangunan kanak-kanak. Pusat beraliran Inggeris ini telah menyediakan dua kumpulan yang terdiri daripada 18 kanak-kanak prasekolah berketurunan Cina, Melayu, India dan Punjabi. Kamera digital kompak dengan fungsi rakaman video telah digunakan untuk merekod kanak-kanak prasekolah ini secara berasingan selama empat hari berturut-turut, iaitu pada September 2009 dan Mac 2010, semasa mereka membaca, melakukan aktiviti, melukis, bermain dan makan. Rakaman-rakaman video ini telah menghasilkan 26 klip berjumlah empat jam, 10 minit dan lima saat, di mana sebanyak 2626 baris ucapan telah dikodkan mengikut 48 kategori yang membentuk rangka rujukan Masa, Orang dan Kandungan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa kanak-kanak prasekolah bandar bercakap terutamanya tentang masa kini (31.6%), subjek bukan manusia (11.6%) dan diri sendiri (11.1%). Ia adalah selaras dengan hasil kajian Marvin, Beukelman, Brockhaus dan Kast (1994). Data menunjukkan bahawa 10 topik perbualan yang paling popular adalah mengenai masa kini, subjek bukan manusia, diri sendiri, rakan-rakan mereka, perlakuan dan maklumat peribadi diri sendiri dan orang lain, bergurau, filem/kartun, deskripsi, angkasa lepas dan barang mainan. Kajian ini mendedahkan kompetensi perbualan kanak-kanak prasekolah di bandar, khususnya dalam pemilihan dan penghuraian topik perbualan. Pengetahuan mengenai perkembangan linguistik, kognitif, psikologi dan sosial mereka dapat membantu dalam pembangunan kurikulum prasekolah yang relevan, menarik dan penuh stimulasi. Ianya bukan sahaja dapat membantu ibubapa, professional penjagaan kanak-kanak dan pendidik dalam usaha mereka untuk membina dan memelihara hubungan interpersonal dengan kanak-kanak prasekolah, malah dapat digunakan untuk

mendiagnosis kesukaran dalam perkembangan bahasa lisan dan perangkaan sebuah sistem untuk membantu kanak-kanak prasekolah yang mempunyai masalah komunikasi ekspresif.

**Kata kunci: Kanak-kanak prasekolah bandar Malaysia, topik perbualan,  
kerangka rujukan**

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## **DEDICATION**

To precious little gifts known as preschoolers  
who have the knack of deriving happiness from the simple joys of life,  
who demonstrate how much more fun it is to be ourselves rather than someone else,  
who inspire hope and resilience with their unbridled  
enthusiasm and unconditional love.

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