

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into four sections. It begins with a presentation of the conversational topics of urban Malaysian preschoolers according to the referential frames of Time, Person and Content. Each frame is analysed according to its frequency of reference and compared with the study by Marvin et al. (1994) where applicable. It is followed by analyses of excerpts that contain the relevant topic categories of that particular frame. After a total of 38 excerpts are analysed, the chapter then proceeds by highlighting the 10 topic categories most referenced by urban Malaysian preschoolers before ending with a summary. The findings are presented through tables as well as charts.

4.2 The Conversational Topics of Urban Malaysian Preschoolers

As stated in Chapter 3, the frameworks of analysis used by Marvin et al. (1994) as well as Tönsing (2001) were adapted and used to code the data, which yielded a total of 48 topic categories. This section analyses the results according to the three referential frames and their respective topic categories.

4.2.1 Time Frame

The referential frame of Time contains four topic categories – “Present”, “Past”, “Future” and “Fantasy”. Utterances that were related to anything that occurs in the

present, have occurred in the past, will occur in the future or discussed in the realm of imagination or make-believe were coded accordingly.

The “Present” topic category consistently ranked first in all 26 conversation clips, with 17 clips referring exclusively to the present. The percentage of this topic category established in each of the 26 clips ranged from 75.4% to 100%. In terms of frequency, it recorded 94.7% overall, making it the most referenced category in the Time Frame. The remaining 5.3% comprised of the “Past”, “Fantasy” and “Future” topic categories, which accounted for 2.9%, 1.3% and 1.1% respectively. Both “Past” and “Future” topic categories were referenced in six clips, whereas the “Fantasy” topic category were referenced in four clips.

The marked difference between the “Present” and the rest of the topic categories concurs with the study by Marvin et al. (1994), which also recorded the highest frequency for the “Present” category, which they termed as “here and now”. Their study demonstrated that preschoolers tend to refer to the present, in both preschool as well as home settings. This is probably due to their limited concept of time and language skills, for instance they might not have grasped the meaning of tenses and subject-verb agreement. Additionally, as this study was conducted in a child care and development centre, they could have been influenced by their conversation partners, which are most likely their peers who might share the same limitations in the ability to talk about different time frames.

Although preschoolers are capable of discussing past and future events by the age of three (Macdonald and Hayne, 1996; Atance and O’Neill, 2005), it is likely that both “Past” and “Future” topic categories were referenced less often because unlike parents

who are better at interpreting the preschoolers' intentions (Nelson and Gruendel, 1979), teachers and peers lack knowledge of preschoolers' past experiences as well as future plans and aspirations. Furthermore, the preschoolers were probably unable to provide these kinds of information due to limitations in linguistic skills such as the use of past and future tenses as well as vocabulary (Keenan and Schieffelin, 1976; Garvey, 1984; Wanska and Bedrosian, 1986; Marvin, 1995) or a genuine limitation in the ability to think of the future (Atance and O'Neill, 2005). According to Marvin et al. (1994), references to the past and future are influenced by the type of questions parents asked and the preschooler's remnant from school such as a class project that would draw comments or questions from their family members and peers.

When Marvin et al. (1994) indicated that fantasy or make-believe play depended on the preschooler's peers, he probably meant that not all preschoolers shared the abilities – in terms of imagination and language, or the interest needed to initiate and support fantasy play. In fact, according to Blum-Kulka and Snow (2004), “they need to be highly attentive to each other in order to be able to make the next relevant contribution to the plot.” This probably explains why the “Fantasy” topic category was ranked third among the four categories despite the fact that the study was conducted among preschoolers.

Figure 4.1

Frequency of Time Frame Topic Categories Referenced According to Percentage

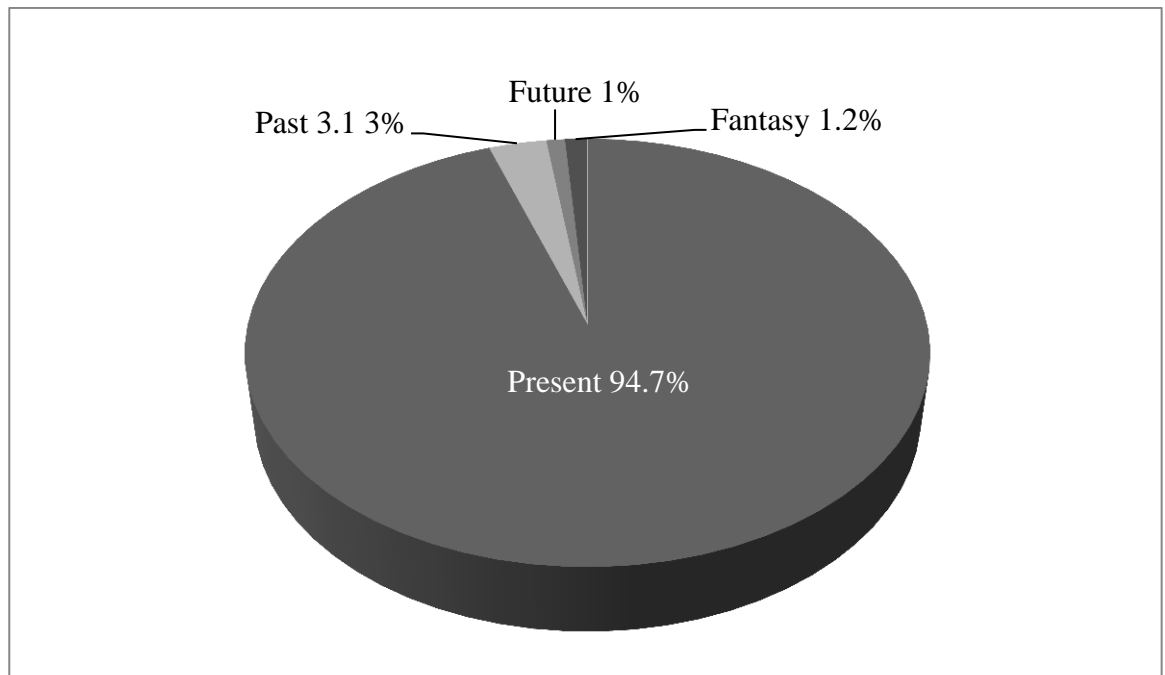


Table 4.1

Time Frame – Topic Categories Analysed

Referential Frame	Topic Category
Time	Present
	Past
	Future
	Fantasy

a) Present

Excerpt 1

This conversation was recorded after lunch during which Nigel, Zhi Eng as well as Kuldeep were in the indoor play area. They were playing a war game – Nigel was playing with a building block; Kuldeep was playing with toy soldiers; and Zhi Eng was playing with a soft toy and toy guns. Seeing that Zhi Eng was having a few toy guns, both Nigel and Kuldeep each asked him for a gun. The excerpt shows the ensuing exchanges.

Date: 24 March 2010 Clip: 12		Group: 2
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T33	Nigel	<i>Give me one.</i>
T34	Zhi Eng	<i>No, you got this.</i>
T35	Kuldeep	<i>Give me one.</i>
T36	Nigel	<i>How about you two take, me take two, you take two?</i>
T37	Zhi Eng	No.
T38	Nigel	Why?
T39	Kuldeep	Why not? Where? <i>That's mine. Gimme mine. Gi, gi, give me mine.</i>
T40	Zhi Eng	<i>I say don't give you.</i>

In the exchange above, Nigel asked Zhi Eng to give him one of his toy guns in T33, an instance of present time action. This is followed by another present time action in T34 when Zhi Eng turned down Nigel's request as Nigel already had a soft toy and a building block. Undeterred, Nigel proposed that they share the toy guns so that each of them would have two. This utterance also indicated that Nigel was making a time reference to the current/present action. However, as Zhi Eng was adamant to have them all to himself, he said "no". Not satisfied with his answer, Nigel pressed on and asked Zhi Eng to justify his decision. They were interrupted by Kuldeep in T39 as he also wanted the toy guns. However, Kuldeep started by claiming that the toys guns belonged to him and seeing that it did not work, he attempted to coax Zhi Eng by asking Zhi Eng to give him the toy guns repeatedly. All these actions also constituted instances of present time actions. It is interesting to note that both Nigel and Kuldeep used different approaches to achieve their goals. Nigel tried to negotiate with Zhi Eng in T36 when he uttered "How about you two take, me take two, you take two?" He used the phrase "How about..." and proposed to him a solution that would lead to a win-win situation for both of them whereas Kuldeep tried to get his way by coaxing. He was also not interested to find out the reason behind Zhi Eng's refusal of his request as shown in T39. Nevertheless, both of them failed in their attempts when Zhi Eng uttered "I say I don't give you" in T40, which also referred to the present time action – this is shown

by the use of linguistic cues like “I say don’t give...” which refers to that particular moment of time.

Excerpt 2

This excerpt features an interaction that happened in the morning during the first lesson of the day. Yusri, Amy and Cindy were seated around the table and the preschoolers were instructed by the teacher to do a colouring task. Yusri and Amy were talking and colouring one of the pages in their activity book, while Cindy was tidying up her space. Moments later, Yusri tried to colour Amy’s face by taking a colour pencil and attempting to draw on her face. However, Amy evaded him by moving to the side. After this occurred, Yusri began to talk to himself as shown in T223.

Turn	Participant	Utterance
T223	Yusri	<i>I colour my face lah.</i>
T224	Amy	<i>Let me see your face. Let me see. Let me see your face. Ya, must wash you face.</i>
T225	Yusri	<i>Ya.</i>
T226	Cindy	<i>Yes you must wash your face. Yes your face green colour.</i>

In the exchange above, Yusri and Amy were in the process of completing their colouring tasks while seated around a table with Cindy who was arranging her books. In T223, Yusri talked about what he was going to do to himself (I colour my face lah) and his utterance indicated that he was making a time reference to the current/present action. When Amy responded “Let me see your face. Let me see. Let me see your face. Ya, must wash you face” in T224, she was also referring to both hers and Yusri’s present time action. This was shown by the use of linguistic cues like “Let me see...” and “... must wash your face”. In T226, another instance of present time action also emerged when Cindy said: “Yes you must wash your face.” It was followed by the

utterance – “Yes your face green colour”, which describes the current condition of Yusri’s face.

b) Past

Excerpt 1

This excerpt was recorded in the afternoon when Amy, Shanti and Nigel were having lunch. As the researcher was at the same table, they began to chat with her. During the conversation, Amy told the researcher that she loved to swim and is able to swim without using a float as well as goggles. Shanti too shared about her swimming skills. The researcher tried to include Nigel by drawing him into the topic of their conversation in T129.

Date: 1 September 2009 Clip: 1		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T129	Researcher	Do you like to swim Nigel? What other things do you like to do?
T130	Nigel	I like to go to the beach.
T131	Amy	I’m <i>ah</i> , my papa and my...
T132	Researcher	<i>Ah...</i> Which beach <i>ah</i> ? Port Dickson <i>ah</i> ?
T133	Nigel	No, <i>I go two times. I go Pangkor and... Redang.</i>
T134	Amy	And then I go...
T135	Researcher	Pangkor and Redang <i>ah</i> ?
T136	Nigel	Erm.
T137	Researcher	Nice <i>ah</i> ?
T138	Nigel	<i>Ya.</i>
T139	Amy	And then <i>I go Ling Pei San de</i> (‘s), <i>I go Ling Pei San his house.</i>
T140	Researcher	Oh, you go, you went...
T141	Amy	<i>And then Ling Pei San go to my house.</i>

Nigel was probably a bit shy as it was the researcher’s first video recording session with them. Nevertheless, when the researcher asked him about his interests, he told her that he enjoyed going to the beach. When the researcher probed further, asking him whether it was Port Dickson, he uttered “No, I go two times. I go Pangkor and...

Redang” in T133. This showed that he was making references to actions in the past. When asked if he enjoyed his visits to those beaches, he answered in the affirmative, which was also a reference to the past. Although Amy’s initial attempts at interrupting the conversation between the researcher and Nigel failed, she persevered until the researcher acknowledged her utterance in T139 where she said: “And then I go Ling Pei San de (‘s), I go Ling Pei San his house”, an instance of past time action. This was followed by “And then Ling Pei San go to my house” in T141, which also referred to an action that occurred in the past. It was likely that both Nigel and Amy have not grasped the concept of tenses as they used the word “go” instead of “went” when they made references to past actions.

c) **Future**

Excerpt 1

In this excerpt, Shanti, Kumar, Imran and Bala were each given a book to read. As they were sitting on the floor, Shanti, instead of reading, began to chat with Kumar about her nightmare. In her nightmare, Kumar died as he was stabbed by robbers. Kumar found her story unbelievable and after a few minutes of probing discovered that she was having nightmares because she had been watching ghost movies. In the excerpt below, he advises her to stop watching ghost movies.

Date: 2 September 2009 Clip: 4		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T26	Shanti	I wanna watch ghost movies.
T27	Kumar	You can bet it, that if you did, that <i>someday you always wanna watch ghost movies, someday you will have a nightmare</i> . Not every day you’ll have a nightmare.
T28	Imran	What is that?
T29	Kumar	You stop, you stop, watching those movies. That’s the, that’s the, that’s the, the thing. <i>Stop watching ghost movies. Problems solved.</i>
T30	Shanti	I can’t stop it.

In the excerpt above, Shanti insisted that she wanted to watch ghost movies because she was addicted to it. In an effort to discourage her, Kumar in T27, predicted that indulging in this hobby would eventually cause her to have a nightmare. Kumar does this by first referring to the linguistic clue – someday (which is a clue that refers to the future event) and then Kumar goes on to say “... you will have a nightmare” and here Kumar uses the modal verbs “will” and “have” to link this prediction to a future event. Although he was interrupted by Imran in T28, he was not distracted and continued to propose a solution to Shanti’s nightmare problem, which is for her to stop watching ghost movies. He made another future reference when he uttered “... Stop watching ghost movies. Problems solved.” However, he failed to convince her.

Excerpt 2

In this excerpt, Bala, Shanti and Kumar were sitting on the floor in the hallway, each reading a book. Shanti finished reading her book and got up to get another one from the teacher. Upon returning to the group, she exchanged books with Imran. Bala, who was also done with his book, politely asked if he could have a look at Shanti’s book. The excerpt below features their subsequent exchanges.

Date: 2 September 2009 Clip: 4		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T122	Bala	Do you think I can look at the picture?
T123	Shanti	<i>When you grow up I don't know.</i>
T124	Kumar	<i>Ya, one day I will come to your house and tell your wife what happened.</i>
T125	Shanti	<i>Ya, I will.</i>

It is clear from the excerpt that Bala’s request was met with a reprimand from Kumar and Shanti. However, instead of scolding Bala directly for looking at the pictures instead of reading, Shanti predicted an unfavourable future for Bala when she uttered

“When you grow up I don’t know” in T123. By saying this, she was forecasting Bala’s future by using the linguistic cue – “When you grow up...” Another instance of future time action also emerged in T124 when Kumar said: “Ya, one day I will come to your house and tell your wife what happened.” Both Kumar and Shanti used the modal verb “will” in T124 – “Ya, one day I will come to your house and tell your wife what happened” and T125 – “Ya, I will”, as they were referring to a future action. Clearly, children, in this case Kumar, could refer to Bala’s future or a future event by using the phrase “one day” and the fact that he foresees Bala having a wife also indicated a future event. While Balandin and Iacono (1998) suggested that frequent use of judgemental remarks may be a reflection of intimacy between speakers, they also postulated that it was possible that sometimes the speakers may not have viewed their remarks as judgemental. It is more likely that they were feeling concerned rather than judgemental in this case.

d) Fantasy

Excerpt 1

It was reading time and both Amy and Yusri were given a book. As their reading skills were limited, they resorted to create their own stories as they browsed through the book. When they came across two pages containing illustrations of winter time and children playing with snow, they each came up with their own interpretations as shown in the following excerpt.

Date: 3 September 2009 Clip: 6		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T1	Amy	<i>Ya, and then, and then, we can do a Christmas tree.</i>
T2	Yusri	<i>No...</i>
T3	Amy	<i>Yes...</i>
T4	Yusri	<i>The robots from the tree will take it, and it will fall everywhere, on the floor.</i>

T5	Amy	<i>No... See, see.</i>
T6	Yusri	Ohoohoohahahahaha... Whoa! <i>Snow machine.</i>
T7	Amy	<i>Yes.</i>
T8	Yusri	<i>There, they are going to put over here floor. See!</i>
T9	Amy	<i>They want to, they want to make that, they want to make it Christmas floor.</i>

Amy began by imagining that both she and Yusri were the characters in the storybook and suggested that they create a Christmas tree in T1. She insisted on doing that although Yusri disagreed and gave his reason in T4 when he uttered “The robots from the tree will take it, and it will fall everywhere, on the floor.” The Christmas tree and robots were clearly figments of their imagination as they were not part of the illustrations. Nevertheless, their differences in opinion did not affect them and they continued to look at the illustrations. In T6, Yusri used the phrase “snow machine” to refer to a mountain of snow from which a group of children used to make snow balls. When Amy played along, Yusri went on to predict that they were going to spread it across the ground. Amy continued the story in T9, deducing that the children were planning to create snow covered grounds, which she termed “Christmas floor” probably due to her limited understanding of the winter climate.

Excerpt 2

Kuldeep, Ben and Anil were seated around a table in the indoor play area after lunch. Kuldeep and Anil were waiting for their parents to pick them up while Ben was waiting for the Mandarin teacher’s arrival. Anil watched as both Kuldeep and Ben played with their toys – a soft toy elephant and an action figure of Mr Incredible. The excerpt below illustrates their conversation.

Date: 24 March 2010		Group: 2
Clip: 16A		
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T31	Kuldeep	<i>Now you die... Now you die... Now I put, I take all your</i>

		<i>power. Now you die. No, you die already.</i>
T32	Ben	<i>Got little bit power only.</i>
T33	Kuldeep	<i>No you die already. I taken all...</i>
T34	Ben	<i>Because I got a little bit power only.</i>
T35	Kuldeep	Doosh. <i>I take all your power.</i>
T36	Ben	Ah!
T37	Kuldeep	Doosh. <i>You cannot fly, I took all your power.</i>
T38	Ben	<i>No you got so many power, I got little bit power only.</i>
T39	Kuldeep	Doosh.
T40	Ben	Oh... woh...

Kuldeep and Ben were having an imaginary battle. Kuldeep pretended to be an elephant, while Ben pretended to be Mr Incredible. Kuldeep managed to catch hold of Ben and killed him by taking all his powers as he uttered “Now you die... Now you die... Now I put, I take all your power. Now you die. No, you die already” in T31. However, Ben did not play along as he insisted that he was still alive as he still had a little bit of power left in T32. Both of them repeated the same argument in T33 and T34. Seeing that Ben was flying, Kuldeep reiterated that he had taken all Ben’s power, implying that he should not be flying in T37. Ben contributed to the plot by creatively justifying his toy’s resilience by saying “No you got so many power, I got little bit power only.” In order to quash Ben’s defiance, Kuldeep pounced on Ben, probably to finish him off. Kuldeep used keywords such as “die”, “take” and “fly”, while Ben used the noun “power” to create their make-believe play.

4.2.2 Person Frame

The referential frame of Person contains 11 categories – “Self”, “Peer”, “We”, “Parent”, “Sibling”, “Family/relatives”, “Teacher”, “Researcher”, “Helper”, “Others” and “No person”. Utterances coded under these categories had references made to individuals, groups of people, non-human beings or objects.

The “No person” category was referenced in all clips and ranked first as it accounted for 34.9% of the Person Frame topic categories referenced. From the data, it appears that participants preferred to talk about things that were not humans such as animals, insects, trees, plants and flowers as well as inanimate objects such as toys, food, utensils, weather, word meanings, space, religion, book, colours, vehicles, places and movies or cartoons characters. In the study by Marvin et al. (1994), the highest percentage of reference in both the preschool and home settings was about objects, specifically toys and food.

The results also indicated that the “No person” category was closely followed by the “Self” category, which took up 33.4% of the overall Person Frame topic categories referenced. It was apparent in all clips except for clip 22, which was a one-minute clip where the preschoolers indulged in playful talk and referred mainly to movie and cartoon characters. The percentage of talk revolving around the self in individual clips ranged from 7.1% to 58.3%. It included conversation on personal likes and dislikes, wants, preferences, actions, possessions, abilities, requests and make-believe roles and situations. It was ranked second possibly due to the fact that in the initial stage of development, children tend to make themselves the topic of conversation (Foster, 1985) and share their opinions and experiences in order to establish and maintain familiarity among peers (Tönsing, 2001). This tendency is not exclusive to children as the “Self” topic category was ranked first in a study of the topic and vocabulary use patterns of elderly American women (Stuart et al., 1993). Its frequency of reference in the Person Frame was approximately one third, which was similar to the study by Marvin et al. (1994). Nevertheless, reference to the self decreases as the preschoolers become more adept at expressing their needs and ideas, converting the “Self” topic category into what Foster (1986) termed as environmental topics which are concerned with the

child's immediate physical and social environment such as expressions of hunger that turn into requests for food and tangible topics which are concerned either with non-perceptible attributes of objects in the "here and now" or things truly not in the "here and now" such as simple request of the mother's attention becomes a request for some future action by the mother of the child.

The same study also stated that references to family, siblings and parents were common at home while references to peers and teachers were more frequent than references to family members at preschool. These were also apparent in the present study where the referencing of peers ranked third and made up 25.2% of the total Person Frame categories referenced, whereas "Parent", "Sibling" and "Family/relatives" were referenced less than 1% overall. Preschoolers speculated as well as talked about peers' ethnic origin, likes, wants, preferences, actions, possessions, abilities, requests, behaviour, make-believe roles and situations and gave instructions as well as questioned, explained, reprimanded and even threatened their peers.

However, unlike the study by Marvin et al. (1994), the percentage of references to teachers was 0.8%, which was the same as the Parent category. This topic category was similarly absent in clip 22, due to the reasons mentioned earlier, as well as in clip 25 as it mainly revolved around the preschoolers' homework. Its frequency in the rest of the clips was between 10.7% and 53.8%. The percentage of reference for the "Others" and "We" topic categories was 2.3% and 1.6% respectively. This may be attributed to the preschoolers' tendency to talk about themselves as mentioned earlier. The "Parent", "Researcher", "Helper", "Sibling", and "Family/relatives" topic categories form the remaining 1.8%.

The result supports the research findings by Vygotsky (1971), Keenan (1974) as well as Nelson and Gruendel (1979) as it indicated that preschoolers' are not egocentric as the "Self" and "No person" each comprised one third of the overall Person Frame topic categories referenced. It is likely that as preschoolers begin schooling, they are not only exposed to a new environment with different groups of people such as teachers, helpers and their peers, but also fed with new information. As their level of curiosity increases, they start to show interest in things and persons apart from themselves. The positive learning and socialising environment allows them to practise their conversational skills by asking and answering questions about themselves, things and their peers; stating their observations; expressing their emotions, needs and wants; requesting, meeting and rejecting requests; sharing and describing their experiences and listening to others. Their repertoire of topics increases as they acquire more knowledge and polish their conversational skills.

Figure 4.2

Frequency of Person Frame Topic Categories Referenced According to Percentage

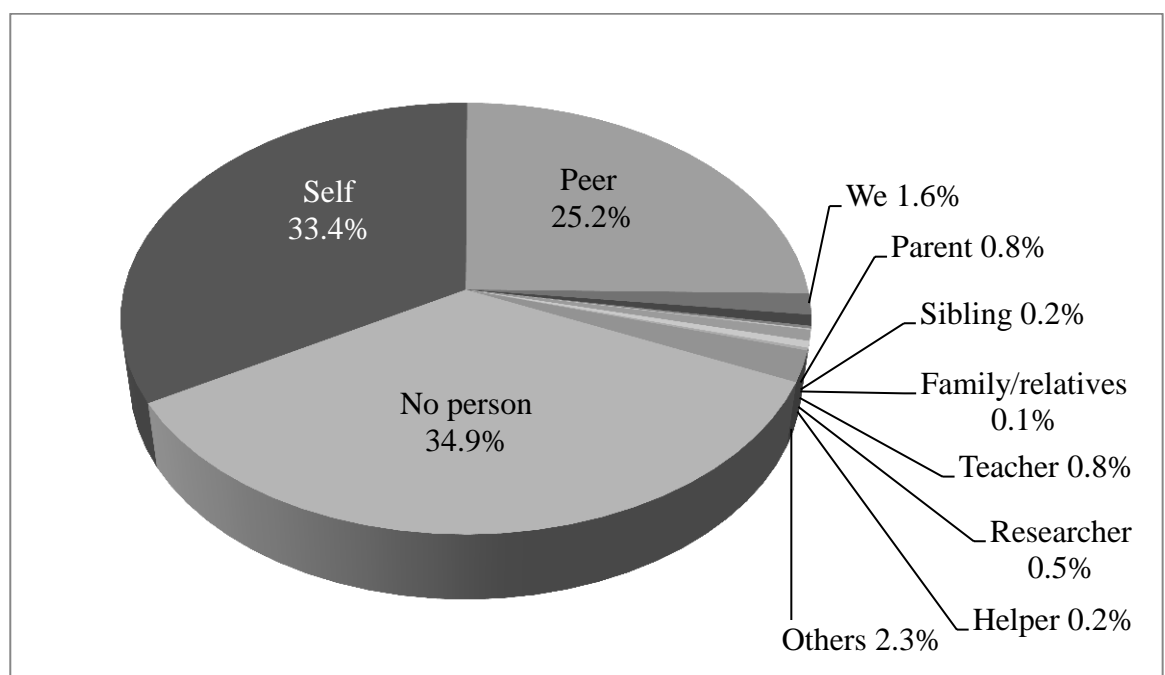


Table 4.2

Person Frame – Topic Categories Analysed

Frame	Topic Category
Person	Self
	Peer
	No person
	Parent
	Teacher

a) Self

Excerpt 1

This excerpt was recorded during playtime, when Nigel, Kuldeep as well as other preschoolers were seated around a table. They were assembling colourful toy parts, making items such as a wrist band, crown, sword and whip, and playing with these self-made items. In this excerpt, Kuldeep wanted Nigel to make him a sword but Nigel ignored him as Nigel was busy playing with his imaginary grass cutter. The excerpt above illustrates the subsequent events.

24 March 2010 Clip: 15B		Group: 2
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T5	Nigel	<i>I cut</i> Zhi Eng hair until <i>botak</i> (bald).
T6	Kuldeep	That's one... Aiyo, Nigel <i>I asked</i> you to make what.
T7	Nigel	Wait, <i>I cut</i> Zhi Eng hair until <i>botak</i> .
T8	Kuldeep	Okay, already <i>botak</i> .
T9	Nigel	<i>I make</i> Reena's hair until <i>botak</i> . Cut, cut, cut, cut. Now <i>I cut</i> ... (pretends to cut Kuldeep's hair)
T10	Kuldeep	No!
T11	Nigel	Now <i>I cut</i> Amy's hair until <i>botak</i> .

Throughout this excerpt, Nigel talks about his imaginary cutting action. He uses the personal pronoun "I" to refer to himself in T5, T7, T9 and T11 before verbs such as "I cut..." and "I make..." In T6, Kuldeep also referred to himself when he uttered "That's one... Aiyo, Nigel I asked you to make what". Another interesting feature of this

excerpt is Nigel’s code-mixing. He probably used the Malay word *botak*, instead of the English word “bald” because of his limited English vocabulary.

Excerpt 2

Amy, Shanti, Nigel and the researcher were sitting in the dining area as it was lunch time. While they were having their meals, Nigel asked the researcher about the duration of her visit. The researcher informed them that she would be video recording them until Friday as she had to work the following week. Both Nigel and Amy did not seem to understand the researcher, probably because they had a limited concept of time. They then asked the researcher if she was coming tomorrow, to which she answered in the affirmative. When the researcher asked them the same question, Nigel replied that he was unsure whereas Amy digressed and began to talk about her plans to go to her grandmother’s house and the swimming pool, as well as her swimming skills in T105.

Date: 1 September 2009 Clip: 1		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T105	Amy	After, after <i>I go to my po po (grandmother) house</i> , my po po house and then, and then <i>ah, I go to the swimming pool and, and I never use that one one, I can touch the floor.</i>
T106	Researcher	You, you don’t use what?
T107	Amy	<i>I don’t use that one loh.</i>
T108	Shanti	The float.
T109	Amy	The float.
T110	Researcher	Oh... In the swimming pool you mean.
T111	Amy	Yes, <i>I can touch the floor.</i>
T112	Researcher	Oh...
T113	Shanti	<i>I don’t even touch the floor. I cannot swim.</i> It’s very deep. <i>I only can swim on top.</i>

In T105, Amy tells the researcher about her plans to go to her grandmother’s house and the swimming pool when she uttered “After, after I go to my po po (grandmother) house, my po po house and then, and then ah, I go to the swimming pool and...” She

then continued to talk her about her swimming abilities and said “and I never use that one one, I can touch the floor.” In this turn alone, she used the personal pronoun “I” four times to refer to herself. She also used verbs such as “go”, “use” and “touch” in their present tense form to refer to her past actions probably because she was not yet familiar with the concept of subject-verb agreement. When the researcher asked her to clarify what she meant when she said “I never use that one one...” she merely repeated her repeated her statement, probably because the words eluded her until Shanti chipped in and told the researcher that she was referring to a swimming float. Another instance of reference to self occurred when Amy repeated “Yes, I can touch the floor” in T111 to inform the researcher that her legs were long enough to reach the bottom of the pool. Shanti probably felt envious when she said “I don’t even touch the floor. I cannot swim. It’s very deep. I only can swim on top.” She also employed the personal pronoun “I” to refer to herself as well as her abilities.

b) Peer

Excerpt 1

In this excerpt, it was reading time and Justin, Amelia as well as Anil were seated around the table waiting for the teacher’s instructions. Both Justin and Amelia noticed Anil taking Amy’s eraser and they asked him to return it. Justin, seeing that Anil was not cooperative, took the eraser from him and returned it to Amy. The excerpt below illustrates their conversation.

Date: 25 March 2010 Clip: 19		Group: 2
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T28	Amelia	Give Amy. Haha titayo, <i>busybody</i> .
T29	Justin	<i>Busybody ah you.</i>
T30	Anil	<i>Busybody.</i>
T31	Justin	<i>You ah, you want beat or not?</i>
T32	Amelia	<i>Want beat or not?</i>

T33	Anil	No... (gently hits Amelia)
T34	Justin	<i>But why you don't want like, why you so naughty?</i>
T35	Amelia	<i>Ya, why you, why you so naughty?</i>

In T28, Amelia was glad when Justin took the eraser from Anil – their peer, and returned it to Amy. Both she and Justin accused Anil of being a busybody, although their usage indicated that they did not really understand what the word “busybody” meant. Anil then reacted by using their accusations (busybody) against them to defend himself and this aggravated the situation, causing them to threaten him by uttering “You ah, you want beat or not?” in T31 and “Want beat or not?” in T32. These were empty threats as they did not beat him. Nonetheless, Anil reacted to the intimidation by saying “No” and then gently hitting Amelia’s head. Amelia, however, did not retaliate probably because it did not hurt. Following that, both Justin and Amelia seemed to be puzzled by Anil’s behaviour and sought to understand by uttering “But why you don’t want like, why you so naughty?” in T34 and “Ya, why you, why you so naughty?” in T35. The subject pronoun “you” was used to refer to Anil in T29, T31, T34 and T35.

Excerpt 2

Nigel, Shanti, Amy and the researcher were seated at one of the dining tables during lunch time. Most of them had almost finished their meals except for Bala who was seated at the next table. Nigel, Shanti and Amy told the researcher that Bala is a slow eater and always finishes last. In the following excerpt, Nigel explains to the researcher why Bala takes a long time to finish his meal.

Date: 1 September 2009 Clip: 1		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T199	Nigel	<i>He always eat like that</i> , see. Like that. <i>He just don't want the carrot.</i>
T200	Shanti	I want the carrot. I like carrot.
T201	Amy	Me also.

T202	Nigel	<i>And then he don't want all the vegetable.</i>
T203	Amy	You know <i>ah...</i>
T204	Researcher	Then what does he like?
T205	Nigel	<i>He just wants, he just wants the rice.</i>
T206	Amy	You know <i>ah...</i>
T207	Researcher	Oh...
T208	Amy	You know I eat my home have the carrot, I eat.
T209	Nigel	Just now Ivan say one. <i>Don't want to eat the vegetable one.</i>
T210	Amy	I go to the animal, I go to the animal and give the rabbit the carrot. And then I love rabbit, it always love to eat carrot.
T211	Nigel	<i>Bala's going to be the last.</i>
T212	Researcher	Who's going to be last?
T213	Nigel and Shanti	<i>Bala.</i>

In T199, Nigel tells the researcher that his peer, Bala, has a habit of eating slowly and is a fussy eater. He uses the personal pronoun “he” to refer to Bala when he uttered “He always eat like that, see. Like that. He just don't want the carrot.” Upon hearing that, Shanti and Amy began to talk about their preference for carrots. Nigel continued to use the personal pronoun “he” in T202 when he concluded that Bala does not like to eat vegetable, and in T205 when he said that Bala only wanted to eat plain rice. In T209, he continued to talk about Bala, telling the researcher that another peer, Ivan, also told him that Bala does not want to eat vegetables. He then predicted that Bala was going to be the last to finish his food. When the researcher asked Nigel “Who's going to be last?” as she did not hear clearly, both Nigel and Shanti answered “Bala” simultaneously.

c) Parent

Excerpt 1

It was towards the end of lunch time and quite a number of preschoolers had finished their meals. After finishing her rice, Amy began to chat with the researcher who was sitting at the same table. Their ensuing conversation is shown below.

Date: 1 September 2009 Clip: 1		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T16	Amy	My, my <i>mama</i> phone number is, erm... zero one six three three three three and then five five five.
T17	Researcher	Wow, that's good.
T18	Amy	So many threes, four. Ai, ou.
T19	Researcher	Can you say it again? What's the number?
T20	Amy	My <i>papa</i> number I don't know, already.
T21	Researcher	Your mother's number, zero one six?
T22	Shanti	(squeals)
T23	Amy	(squeals)
T24	Shanti	Mine also zero one six. I don't know my <i>mother's</i> phone number. I only know my <i>father</i> and my <i>sister's</i> .

As the preschoolers were having lunch, Amy recited her mother's mobile phone number to the researcher in T16. Not only was she able to memorise the numbers, she also pointed out that the number "3" was repeated four times. However, when the researcher asked her to repeat the numbers, she assumed that the researcher was asking for her father's number and uttered "My papa number I don't know, already" in T20. When the researcher repeated her request and mentioned the numbers 016, Shanti who was also seated at the same table, squealed in surprise as her father's mobile phone number also began with the numbers 016. She probably anticipated that the researcher would pose the same questions she asked Amy earlier. Therefore, without any prompting, Shanti proceeded to inform the researcher that she had forgotten her mother's mobile phone number and could only remember her father and sister's. In this excerpt, the preschoolers used relationship nouns such as "mama", "papa", "mother" and "father" as well as possessive pronoun such as "mine" (as in my father) to refer to their parents. The preschoolers did not seem to mind disclosing personal information to the researcher although it was their first recording session with her.

d) Teacher

Excerpt 1

Shanti, Nigel and Imran were seated around the table in the indoor play area. Earlier, they were instructed by the teacher to draw one of the alien figures pasted on the wall. After drawing for almost 20 minutes, Shanti announced that she had finished drawing one alien figure and was done for the day. The following excerpt contains the ensuing exchanges.

Date: 1 September 2009 Clip: 2C		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T12	Shanti	<i>Teacher Jessie</i> said draw one, of the aliens.
T13	Researcher	You can draw as many as you want.
T14	Shanti	I thought <i>Teacher Jessie</i> said only draw one.
T15	Researcher	It's okay.
T16	Shanti	He draw so many but I only draw one.

In T12, Shanti announced to her peers that their teacher only instructed them to draw one of the alien figures, probably because she observed that both Nigel and Imran drew quite a number of alien figures. When the researcher told her that she could draw as many as she wanted, she defended her decision by uttering “I thought Teacher Jessie said only draw one” in T14, re-emphasising that the teacher only told them to draw one alien figure. By this, it can be deduced that she was well aware of who was the figure authority in the preschool and used it to her advantage. This was supported by the fact that in utterance T16, she seemed to be lamenting her drawing skills when she commented that she could only draw one alien figure compared to Imran who drew many alien figures. In this excerpt, Shanti used the proper noun “Teacher Jessie” to refer to her class teacher.

e) **No person**

Excerpt 1

This excerpt was recorded in the afternoon, after the preschoolers had their lunch and shower. Shanti, Nigel and Imran were seated around a table and were looking at printouts of alien and monster movie characters, which their teacher had pasted on the wall and instructed them to draw some of them. Imran was busy drawing, while Shanti and Nigel were busy selecting and talking about the characters as illustrated in the excerpt below.

Date: 1 September 2009 Clip: 2A		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T66	Imran	Look, so funny. Don't even know if <i>it</i> looks like the same. I don't know what <i>alien</i> , which one <i>alien</i> that I want to do. I feel want to do this one.
T67	Shanti	I want to draw inside the Mon, the Monsters Incorporated, <i>that boy</i> got so many eyes.
T68	Nigel	Not comported.
T69	Shanti	Then?
T70	Nigel	Monster versus Alien.
T71	Shanti	No not <i>this one</i> , <i>another one</i> . Is <i>the one</i> in the another one.
T72	Nigel	Huh, <i>the one</i> in what?
T73	Shanti	Is a, is the, <i>the blue one</i> remember? After that got that small kid also living in <i>alien is monster</i> that one.
T74	Nigel	Oh, that one is the <i>bad guy</i> . Got so many legs.
T75	Shanti	No, I'm talking about...
T76	Nigel	Got four eyes.
T77	Shanti	I think so many eyes.

Imran erased his drawing as he felt that they looked weird and were not similar to the one he had chosen, so he decided to draw a different alien. He used the object pronoun “it” and the noun “alien” in T66 to refer to his drawing. Shanti, on the other hand, talked about a character that had many eyes in a movie called Monsters Inc. She, however, used the noun “boy” to refer to that male character although it was not human, either because she could not remember its name or had not completely grasped

the concept of nouns. Nigel mistakenly thought she was referring to another character in the movie, Monsters vs. Aliens. She corrected him in T71 and told him that she was not talking about the monster in the printout but rather another character in the same movie. The pronoun “one” was used when she uttered “No not this one, another one. Is the one in the another one.” It was repeated in T72 when Nigel asked “Huh, the one in what?” Shanti then referred to the alien as “the blue one” and “monster” whereas Nigel referred to it as “bad guy”. There was probably a miscommunication as both of them seemed to have had a different alien in mind.

Excerpt 2

In this excerpt, Amy, Yu Han, Ben, Zhi Eng and Kee Sim were seated at a table, browsing through a comic book during playtime. They came to a page that featured princesses as well as their accompanying fashion accessories. Not only did Amy begin her imaginary shopping spree and selected the items she wanted, she also asked Yu Han, another preschooler, to select her purchases, as can be seen in the following excerpt.

Date: 25 March 2010 Clip: 21		Group: 2
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T62	Amy	<i>Wait, this one, this one ah?</i> And then some more? <i>And the bag, bag and this one.</i>
T63	Yu Han	I want to buy <i>this, this.</i>
T64	Zhi Eng	No only one only.
T65	Amy	One only. One only.
T66	Kee Sim	I want to buy <i>er...</i>
T67	Yu Han	<i>This, this.</i>
T68	Kee Sim	I want buy <i>this</i> , I want buy <i>this</i> . <i>Ah...</i>

In T62, when Amy uttered “Wait, this one, this one ah? And then some more? And the bag, bag and this one” she was not referring to anyone but instead she was referring to

the fashion accessories featured on a particular page in her comic book. Therefore, she used both “this” and “one” pronouns. Yu Han too used the pronoun “this” in T63 when she selected the items she wanted to buy. Both Zhi Eng and Amy reminded her that she could only select one item. However, Yu Han ignored them and continued to choose two items when she uttered “This, this” in T67. Another instance of reference to the No person category emerged when Kee Sim joined them and selected the item she wanted in T68 by uttering “I want buy this, I want buy this.” She too referred to the item using the pronoun “this”. Similarly, shopping for food was among the preschoolers’ play in the study conducted by Marvin et al. (1994).

4.2.3 Content Frame

The referential frame of Content contains 33 topic categories – “Toys”, “Food/drinks”, “Animals/insects”, “Utensils/equipment/tools”, “Clothes”, “Vehicles”, “Places/locations”, “Actions/positions/personal information”, “Traits/conditions/skills”, “Social/greeting”, “Grooming”, “People”, “Being playful”, “Words/numbers”, “Movies/cartoons”, “Natural phenomena”, “Dreams”, “Time”, “Space”, “Body”, “Relationships”, “Money”, “Death”, “Books/magazines”, “Religion”, “Gender”, “Lessons/homework”, “Weapons/soldiers”, “Trees/flowers/plants”, “Furniture/household appliances”, “Colours”, “Descriptions” and “Miscellaneous”. While it contained the most topic categories, only three topic categories – “Actions/positions/personal information”, “Being playful” and “Movies/cartoons”, formed the bulk with a frequency of 10% and above. The rest were referenced with a frequency of less than 7%.

The “Actions/positions/personal information” topic category was created by the researcher in order to place all utterances that were related to a person’s actions, positions and personal information under it. Furthermore, they could not be combined with other categories that were not related. It comprised 19.6% of the total categories referenced, placing it first among 33 Content Frame topic categories. It was referenced in 23 clips with frequencies ranging between 8% and 47.9%. This could be due to not only preschoolers’ tendency to talk about themselves but also their natural curiosity about their surroundings which includes the people around them such as their family members, peers, teachers, helpers and the researcher as well as insects, animals and cartoons or movie characters. Therefore, it was only natural that they talked about matters such as their behaviour, actions, religion and favourite colours, their parents’ telephone number and occupation, their siblings’ names and birth years, their teachers’ birth dates, their peers’ names, behaviour, actions and ethnic origins, insect and animal behaviour as well as fairy tale princes and princesses.

“Being playful” ranked second among the Content Frame topic categories. This category comprised 12% overall and was found in 21 clips with a range of 0.7% to 100%. As clip 16 revolved around imaginary play between two preschoolers, it scored 100% for the “Being playful” category. Instances of being playful include teasing of peers, pretend plays where the preschoolers take on the roles of their favourite movie, cartoon or comic characters or pretend to be boyfriend and girlfriend, teacher and student, police and soldier as well as mother, father and child in make-believe scenarios such as nightmares, meteor crashes, battlefields, magical transformations, shopping sprees or being hunted and killed by evil characters.

The “Movies/cartoons” category constituted 11.4% and ranked third in the Content Frame in terms of overall frequency of reference. In the 13 clips where it was referenced, it was found to range between 0.4% and 36.9%. It included talk about animated movies such as *Monsters Inc.* and *Monsters vs. Aliens* and the characteristics of its creatures, the task of drawing monster and alien characters as well as UFOs, ghost and romantic movies, action figures as well as fairy tale, story and comic book characters such as Ben 10, XLR8 and Little Mermaid.

The next most referenced topic category is “Description”, which made up 6.6% of the Content Frame topic categories referenced, with percentages ranging between 2% and 21.1% in each of the 21 clips it was referenced. It comprised conversations that described the preschoolers and their peers’ works, people, fictional characters, food, fruits, books, magazines, distances, toys, feelings, strength and natural occurrences.

Both “Toys” and “Space” each constituted 4.7% of Content Frame categories referenced. The former was referenced in nine clips with frequencies ranging from 0.6% to 25.4%, while the latter was referenced in seven clips with frequencies ranging between 0.4% and 46.4%. In the investigation by Marvin et al. (1994), “Toys” was among the most frequently referenced in both home and preschool settings. Wanska and Bedrosian (1986) contended that play materials have a significant effect on preschoolers’ conversation topic. This contention was supported by Burroughs and Murray (1992) who found that while preschoolers initiated more topics when they played with puppets, they maintained more topics when they played with Playdoh. The data showed that preschoolers referred to toys such as soldiers, Ben 10, XLR8, Mr Incredible, guns, knife, sword, puppy, crocodile and elephant soft toys, Lego blocks as well as picture-word match puzzles. The Space topic category consisted of talk about

astronauts, rockets, space stations, sun, moon, planets, stars, comets and radio telescopes, which was stimulated by book reading sessions led by the class teacher.

The “Places/locations” topic category was referenced at a frequency of 4% overall. It was found in 17 clips with frequencies ranging between 1.2% and 15.8%. Under this category, preschoolers talked about their own, their grandparents and their peers’ homes, their preschool, their country and other countries, their parents’ workplaces and cars, their favourite places such as the swimming pool, holiday destinations and animal parks as well as the planets.

Topic categories that were referenced at frequencies below 4% include “People” (3.1%), “Words/numbers” (2.9%), “Colours” (2.8%), “Utensils/equipment/tools” (2.7%), “Animals/insects” and “Books/magazines” (2.6%), “Food/drinks” and “Traits/condition/skills” (2.5%), “Vehicles” and “Body” (2.1%), “Weapons” and “Soldiers” (2%), “Time” and “Gender” (1.3%), “Lessons/homework” (1.1%), “Social/greeting” and “Natural phenomena” (1.0%), “Miscellaneous”, “Dreams” and “Furniture/household appliances” (0.5%), “Grooming”, “Money” and “Religion” (0.3%), “Clothes”, “Death” and “Trees/flowers/plants” (0.2%), and “Relationships” (0.1%). Figure 4.3 illustrates the frequency of Content Frame Topic Categories referenced according to percentage.

Figure 4.3:

Frequency of Content Frame Topic Categories Referenced According to Percentage

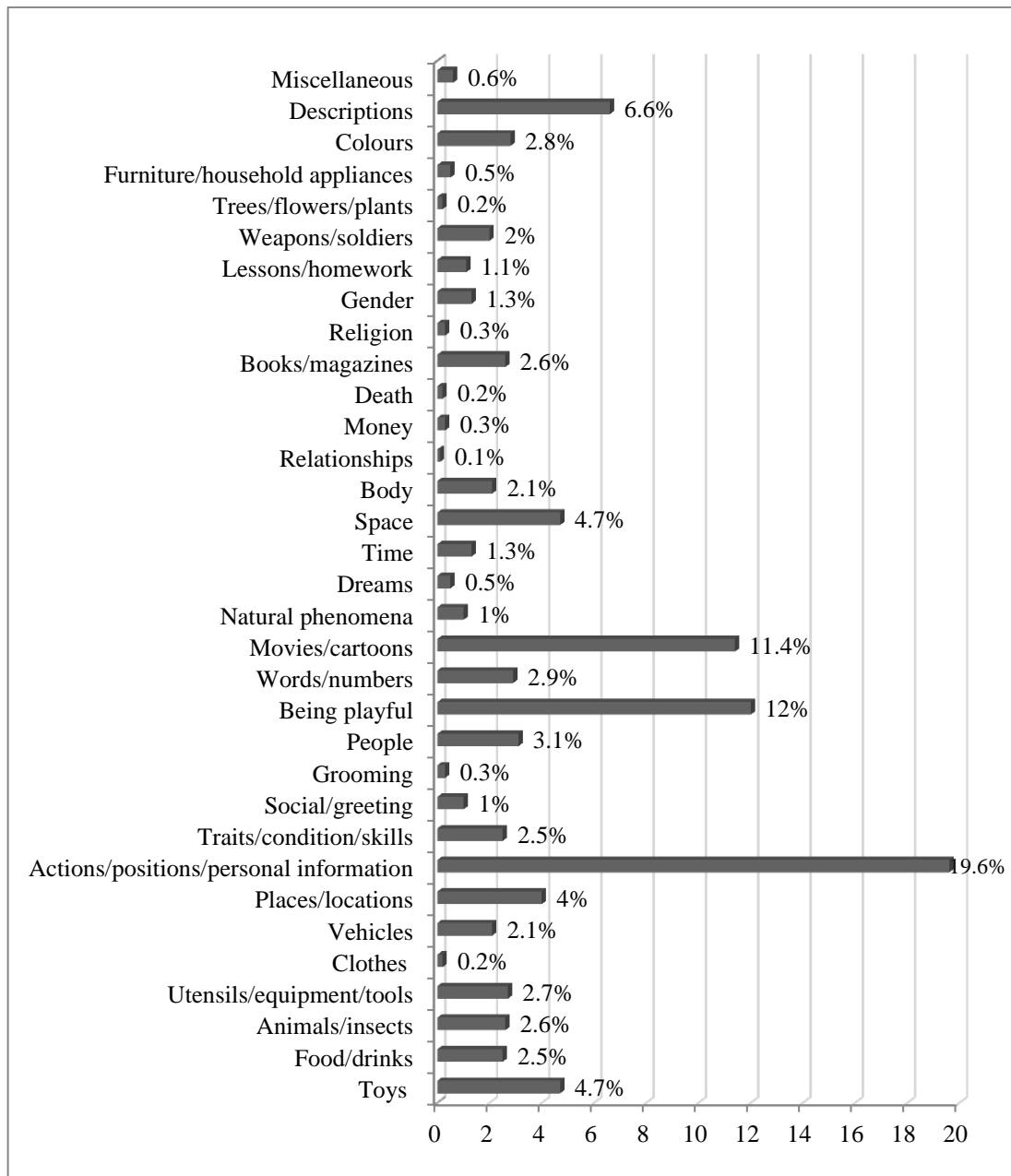


Table 4.3

Content Frame – Topic Categories Analysed

Referential frame	Topic category
Content	Toys
	Food/drinks
	Actions/positions/personal information
	Traits/condition/skills
	Being playful
	Words/numbers
	Movies/cartoons
	Natural phenomena
	Money
	Dreams
	Body
	Relationships
	Money
	Death
	Books/magazines
	Religion
	Weapons/soldiers
Trees/flowers/plants	

a) Toys

Excerpt 1

Kuldeep, Ben, Zhi Eng, Nigel and some other preschoolers were seated around a play table. They had some free time before their lesson began and were creating homes and aircrafts using Lego blocks. Each of them was busy rummaging through the pile of blocks, searching for parts for their creations while having conversations such as the excerpt featured below.

Date: 26 March 2010 Clip: 24A		Group: 2
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T68	Kuldeep	I need big <i>one</i> like Ben.
T69	Zhi Eng	You want which <i>one</i> ?
T70	Ben	This <i>one</i> ?
T71	Kuldeep	Ah, like this <i>one</i> .
T72	Zhi Eng	Ben steal my <i>home</i> everyday, okay. <i>Oi</i> .
T73	Kuldeep	You can make for me like <i>that ah</i> Nigel? I find the <i>wheel</i>

		ah. Now I found one <i>wheel</i> . Ah there I found one <i>wheel</i> . I found the <i>wheel</i> .
--	--	---

Kuldeep told Zhi Eng that he was looking for a piece of land and pointed out that it was similar to the one Ben was having in T68. Upon looking at Ben’s land, Zhi Eng accused Ben of stealing parts from him by uttering “Ben steal my home everyday, okay. Oi” in T72 and went on to transfer them to his own land. Ben did not show any signs of protest – possibly due to his accommodating nature or the fact that he was accustomed to his cousin’s domineering nature, and continued to play. Kuldeep, on the other hand, was looking for aeroplane parts as he wanted Nigel to make an aircraft for him. Pronouns such as “one” and “that” as well as nouns such “home” and “wheel” were used to refer to the toys they were playing with.

b) Food/drinks

Excerpt 1

It was lunch time and the preschoolers were having fried chicken and French fries. Nigel, Kuldeep, Amy, Justin, the researcher and a helper were seated at the same table. Kuldeep pretended that his piece of fried chicken was very hot and made exaggerated gestures. Nigel and Amy played along but Justin was more interested in enjoying his fried chicken. The excerpt below shows the ensuing conversation.

Date: 26 March 2010 Clip: 26		Group: 2
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T15	Nigel	Mine is the <i>chicken butt</i> .
T16	Kuldeep	Ee... Are you eating the <i>chicken butt</i> ?
T17	Kuldeep and Nigel	(laughs)
T18	Kuldeep	The <i>chicken butt</i> .
T19	Nigel	There one piece of is here.
T20	Kuldeep	He’s actually eating the <i>chicken butt</i> . He’s actually eating the <i>chicken butt</i> .

When Nigel then told Kuldeep that he was eating a piece of chicken bottom – which was untrue as it was a piece of chicken breast, Kuldeep played along. In T16, Kuldeep uttered “Ee... Are you eating the chicken butt?” in mock disgust. This drew laughter from Nigel probably because he knew it was untrue and he was just playing the fool. In T20, Kuldeep tried to convince the helper who was sitting at the same table by saying “He’s actually eating the chicken butt. He’s actually eating the chicken butt”. However, it was obvious that he was not being serious as he smiled as he said it. Throughout this excerpt, both Nigel and Kuldeep used the noun phrase “chicken butt” to refer to the food Nigel was having.

c) Actions/positions/personal information

Excerpt 1

In this excerpt, Kumar, Shanti, Imran as well as Bala were each given a book to read in the hallway. Everyone was reading except for Bala, who preferred to look at the pictures instead. While halfway through his book, he turned to Kumar as he wanted to share his discovery with him as depicted the following excerpt.

Date: 2 September 2009 Clip: 4		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T39	Bala	Kumar, the road is broken.
T40	Shanti	<i>Bala, are you looking at the pictures or reading?</i>
T41	Kumar	<i>Why are you looking this way?</i>
T42	Imran	Where where where?
T43	Kumar	<i>Bala, can you just read?</i>
T44	Bala	There.
T45	Shanti	Bala, you’re...
T46	Imran	<i>You are, you are just looking at the picture.</i>

Despite his attempts to get their attention, Bala, received negative responses from his peers. Before Kumar could react, Shanti had reprimanded Bala in T40 when she interrogated “Bala, are you looking at the pictures or reading?” Shanti was referring to

Bala's action (looking/reading) by using the present continuous form of the verbs "look" and "read". This utterance was followed by Kumar who was also annoyed. In his utterance in T41, he also used the present continuous form of the verb "look" when referring to Bala's actions. On the contrary, Imran was the only one who was curious to find out what Bala was talking about in T42. Subsequently in T43, Kumar told Bala to focus on his reading. When Imran realised that Bala was referring to one of the pictures in the book, he too accused him of not reading in T46 by uttering "You are, you are just looking at the picture".

Excerpt 2

This excerpt was recorded in the morning during reading time. Class had just begun and Nigel, Amy, Amelia and Justin were already seated at the table except for Anil who was the last to join them. As Justin observed that he was walking around the class, looking for things to play with earlier, he scolded him for not behaving properly in class. The ensuing conversation is shown below.

Date: 25 March 2010 Clip: 19		Group: 2
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T1	Justin	<i>Now ah, class cannot run, run, run, run, you know? You cannot behave one ah, is it? Is it, is it? Or what? (grabs workbook from Anil)</i>
T2	Anil	This is, this is my picture.
T3	Justin	No, this is other people one.
T4	Amelia	Kee Sim!
T5	Anil	My one.
T6	Amelia	No, Kamelia and Kee Sim.
T7	Anil	Eh, it's my one.
T8	Amelia	No. I don't want you.
T9	Justin	Put on teacher there. Put on teacher there.
T10	Amelia	I put on teacher already. No more.
T11	Anil	Ah hah...
T12	Justin	Nigel one... Eh you see Nigel, he take your one. Nigel, he take your paper.
T13	Anil	(throws paper on table)
T14	Amelia	Ta da... (retrieves it)

T15	Anil	Can you... (mumbles and smilingly points at Justin)
T16	Justin	<i>You cannot like that one you know.</i> I wear er, I wear... (touches Anil's hand) He's so black. (looks at Amy's book and laughs) A parrot.

When Justin scolded Anil in T1, he referred to Anil's actions using the verb "run". It was interesting to note that his scolding took the form of questions instead of statements or commands. It also sounded very adult-like probably because he had learnt it from his parents or caregivers. Anil, however, ignored him, took a workbook from the table and began to flip through it. As Justin noticed that Anil was not paying attention to him, he grabbed the workbook Anil was holding. Cheekily, Anil protested by saying that the workbook belonged to him, which was untrue. He then tried to take another workbook but his attempt was thwarted by Justin and Amelia who managed to grab both workbooks from him and place them at the teacher's desk. Anil was nevertheless undeterred. When he discovered a piece of paper on the table, he decided to take it. However, when Justin reported Anil's actions to Nigel in T12, Anil panicked and quickly threw the piece of paper on the table when Nigel looked at him. Amelia quickly retrieved it and returned it to Nigel. Anil did not seem to be bothered by Justin and Amelia's actions as he started to mumble and playfully pointed his finger at Justin, probably an attempt to imitate Justin. However, he could only utter "Can you" which was followed by mumbled words. In T16, Justin again made reference to Anil's action when he responded by advising him to behave by uttering "You cannot like that one you know" in an earnest tone.

d) Traits/condition/skills

Excerpt 1

Amy, Shanti and the researcher were seated around the same table during lunch. Amy had finished her rice and was having her fruit dessert. Subsequently, she started to tell

the researcher about going to the swimming pool, her swimming partner as well as her swimming skills as illustrated in the following excerpt.

Date: 1 September 2009 Clip: 1		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T119	Amy	But she, but she cannot open the eyes. <i>I can open, er I can open the eyes and swim you know.</i>
T120	Researcher	Oh.
T121	Shanti	You need goggles lah.
T122	Researcher	Yes, you need goggles.
T123	Amy	No...
T124	Researcher	If not your eyes will be painful.
T125	Amy	<i>It's not pain one my eyes.</i>
T126	Researcher	Really? Because ah, the water in the swimming pool they will add chlorine you know. It's a kind of chemical.
T127	Amy	<i>Never go inside my eyes.</i>

In T119, Amy proudly told the researcher that unlike her friend, she is able to swim without goggles. Although both Shanti and the researcher told her that she needed to wear them, she uttered “It’s not pain one my eyes” probably because she was not convinced. According to her, her eyes did not hurt whenever she went swimming without them. Even when the researcher told her that there was chlorine in the swimming pool, she stood her ground and insisted that the chemical did not get into her eyes when she said “Never go inside my eyes” in T127, which was impossible. It was quite likely due to the fact that she had a limited understanding of chemicals such as chlorine.

e) Being playful

Excerpt 1

In this excerpt, it was lunch time and the conversation involved Shanti, Nigel and the researcher. While eating, Shanti told the researcher about her parents’ occupations and workplaces – her mother is a music teacher at Jean Gan Academy, a music and dance

school. Since her mother is a music teacher, the researcher wanted to find out whether or not Shanti was musically inclined. The excerpt below features the subsequent exchanges.

Date: 1 September 2009 Clip: 1		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T266	Researcher	I've heard of the place before. Do you know how to play the piano?
T267	Shanti	(nods)
T268	Researcher	<i>Wah.</i> That's very good.
T269	Nigel	<i>Do you know how to play Shanti?</i>
T270	Researcher	Faster Nigel, finish your food.
T271	Shanti	<i>And there's a song called Nigel.</i>
T272	Nigel	<i>Hm!</i>
T273	Researcher	(laughs)
T274	Shanti	<i>And Bala.</i>
T275	Nigel	<i>Hm!</i>
T276	Shanti	<i>And Imran. No don't have.</i>

In T268, Nigel playfully asked “Do you know how to play Shanti?” where the word “play” was not paused. Shanti realised that it was a play of words, so instead of answering his question, she decided to play along by uttering “And there’s a song called Nigel” in T271. When Nigel responded by feigning surprise, she continued by saying that there was another song called Bala, to which Nigel reacted in the same way – with a “Hm!” She went on to say that there was also a song named Imran, but changed her mind later. In this excerpt, it was interesting to note that even young children do play or tease among themselves, in this case through linguistic cues.

Excerpt 2

Amy and Yusri were reading a storybook with various short stories. However, both of them made up stories as they flipped through the pages as their reading skills were limited. Amy was excited when she saw illustrations of a mermaid and a man, and drew

Yusri's attention to it. They then began to weave a story around the illustrations as shown in the excerpt below.

Date: 3 September 2009 Clip: 6		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T52	Amy	<i>Lah lah lah. Oh Little Mermaid... Here, Little Mermaid.</i>
T53	Yusri	<i>Ya. But, he, he, he said he, I want to swim with you but cannot swim inside.</i>
T54	Amy	<i>But I want, but I want to swim like Little Mermaid like this. I want to... this one is me.</i>
T55	Yusri	<i>But, but...</i>
T56	Amy	<i>I have, I have tail... This one is you. I kiss you.</i>
T57	Amy and Yusri	<i>(laughs)</i>
T58	Yusri	<i>But, but Amy, Amy... That's for magic. We have to put magic on your knees, then got, got this, like this.</i>

The illustrations stimulated Yusri's imagination and in T53 he came up with a dialogue for the male character when he said "Ya. But, he, he, he said he, I want to swim with you but cannot swim inside." He probably meant that since the man was human, he could not dive deep into the ocean with the mermaid. Amy, on the other hand, wanted to be the cartoon character, Little Mermaid, and imagined being and swimming like a mermaid. Yusri's attempt to interrupt Amy in T54 was unsuccessful as she continued to portray herself as a mermaid and Yusri as the male character whom she kisses. Amy immediately smiled after saying that probably because she was being playful. It was followed by a chuckle from both Yusri and Amy as it was likely that they both found the idea of kissing each other amusing. In T58, Yusri continued to play along and added to the plot of their story when he uttered "But, but Amy, Amy... That's for magic. We have to put magic on your knees, then got, got this, like this." He probably meant that they needed a magic spell to transform Amy into a real mermaid.

f) **Words/numbers**

Excerpt 1

It was the first lesson of the day and the preschoolers were seated at their places. Nigel and Kuldeep drew on their art blocks whereas Zhi Eng, Amy and Ben looked at a storybook, while they waited for their teacher. Zhi Eng and Amy were probably sharing a joke as he suddenly roared. This caught Kuldeep’s attention and he was curious to find out what Zhi Eng was laughing about. The following excerpt illustrates their subsequent exchanges.

Date: 25 March 2010 Clip: 22		Group: 2
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T1	Zhi Eng	Aiyo! (laughs)
T2	Kuldeep	Nigel, what is going on?
T3	Zhi Eng	I think this one is not a <i>nen nen</i> (breast). <i>That is a muscle. My mother, people say muscle one.</i> You don’t know?
T4	Kuldeep	<i>Is it a master?</i>
T5	Zhi Eng	<i>Ya, no, not master.</i>
T6	Kuldeep	<i>Master</i> , hu wah!
T7	Zhi Eng	<i>Not master, it’s muscle</i> (flexes muscles).
T8	Kuldeep	Hu wah! (flexes muscles)

Kuldeep was amused by Zhi Eng’s antics and tried to draw Nigel’s attention to what was happening but Nigel was more interested in drawing. Noticing Kuldeep’s interest, Zhi Eng showed him the picture on the cover of the storybook he was looking at earlier. He told Kuldeep that they were bulging muscles instead of breasts. As Kuldeep was sitting on the other end of the table, he could not hear Zhi Eng clearly and thought that he uttered the word “master”. In T5, Zhi Eng tried to correct him by saying “Ya, no, not master.” Kuldeep, however, still thought that Zhi Eng said “master” and proceeded to make a bowing gesture. In an effort to clarify what he meant, not only did Zhi Eng emphasise that he said “muscle” instead of “master”, he also flexed his muscles. His

tactic worked as Kuldeep finally understood what he meant as he imitated Zhi Eng by roaring and flexing his own muscles.

Excerpt 2

After having their lunch and shower, Nigel, Imran and Shanti were instructed by their teacher to draw some alien figures. Shanti went to the kitchen to have a cup of water while Nigel and Imran were busy drawing alien figures. After he had completed some of his drawings, Nigel began to ask for the researcher's opinions about his work as featured in the excerpt below.

Date: 1 September 2009 Clip: 2C		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T59	Nigel	Let's say <i>ah</i> " <i>ooh cha cha ooh choo</i> "... (laughs)
T60	Researcher	What is that?
T61	Nigel	Because that, because he is <i>not word at all</i> , so you must say that. Because, we don't know what's the <i>word</i> called.
T62	Researcher	So, how, what should we say?
T63	Nigel	Then we don't know we must say a very gua... <i>funny language</i> .
T64	Researcher	Like what <i>ah</i> ? Like how <i>ah</i> ?
T65	Nigel	That you hear me just now.
T66	Researcher	Can you repeat that again?
T67	Nigel	I, argh, I think I already forgot.

In T59, Nigel told the researcher that one of the alien figures he drew was called "ooh cha cha ooh choo." As the researcher was slightly baffled, she asked him to clarify what he meant. When he explained by uttering "Because that, because he is not word at all, so you must say that. Because, we don't know what's the word called" he probably meant that since the alien figure was an unknown flying object from another realm, earthlings such as himself and the researcher would not know how or what to call him. When the researcher asked him for a solution, he told the researcher that a weird language, probably one that the alien was familiar with, should be used instead. But

when the researcher asked him to give her a few examples, he told her that it was similar to what he uttered in T59. However, when the researcher requested that he repeat the word, he told her that he had forgotten how to say it. In this excerpt, Nigel creatively came up with a name for his alien figure. He tried to justify his decision to name it so, by giving reasons, such as “Then we don’t know we must say a very gua... funny language” in T63.

g) Movies/cartoons

Excerpt 1

It was reading time and Kumar, Imran, Bala and Shanti were reading books on space and natural phenomena in the hallway. Kumar was interrupted by Shanti who wanted to tell him about the nightmare she had last night. In her nightmare, someone stabbed and killed Kumar. After a few minutes of probing and attempting to convince her that nightmares are not real, Kumar found out that she had a nightmare because she watched a ghost movie the previous day. He then asked her to stop watching ghost movies to prevent her from having more nightmares in the future. This led their conversation to the topic of movies as shown in the excerpt below.

Date: 2 September 2009 Clip: 4		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T32	Shanti	I don’t know. And every time <i>ah</i> , and then my aunty didn’t allow me to watch the <i>ghost movies</i> .
T33	Kumar	And then don’t watch <i>ghost movies</i> .
T34	Imran	Why are you, why are you, why are you talking? Why are you not reading?
T35	Shanti	And then my sister, and then my aunty said why don’t you watch <i>Prince and the... Princess. They kiss lips together</i> .
T36	Kumar	Yuck! Okay okay okay, let’s read your book.
T37	Imran	Bwek!

In T32, Shanti told Kumar that she is addicted to ghost movies and cannot stop watching ghost movies. She also told him that her aunt did not allow her to watch ghost movies, probably as her aunt knew that she was prone to having nightmares. Kumar supported her aunt's action when he uttered "And then don't watch ghost movies." Imran who was nearby was annoyed and distracted by their conversation as he was trying to read his book. His reprimand in T34 fell on deaf ears as both Shanti and Kumar ignored him and continued to talk. In T35, Shanti told Kumar that both her sister and aunt suggested that she watched a romantic movie when she uttered "And then my sister, and then my aunty said why don't you watch Prince and the... Princess. They kiss lips together." Kumar probably found the idea of kissing disgusting as he reacted with a "Yuck" before asking Shanti to resume reading. Imran who overheard their conversation also reacted similarly as he uttered "Bwek" in T37. Shanti, on the other hand, just smiled at their reactions. This excerpt revolved around the topic of ghost and romantic movies.

h) Natural phenomena

Excerpt 1

It was raining in the afternoon and most of the preschoolers had finished their lunch except for Amy, Shanti, Nigel and Bala. Amy noticed that there was a bucket on the kitchen floor and asked the researcher why it contained water. When the researcher told her that it was collecting rain water that was leaking from the ceiling, she seemed surprised and continued to ask questions about the rain as depicted in the excerpt below.

Date: 1 September 2009 Clip: 1		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T161	Amy	Is this, is this the <i>rain</i> ?

T162	Researcher	Yes. Rain water.
T163	Amy	How the <i>rain</i> , how the <i>rain</i> come from?
T164	Researcher	The rain came from the sky, from the clouds.
T165	Amy	And, and then, and then will blocking the broken one <i>ah</i> ?
T166	Researcher	<i>Ah</i> , because there was a, hole in the roof, it went through the hole and now it's dripping on the ceiling.
T167	Amy	Uhuh, and then?
T168	Researcher	And then from the ceiling the water is leaking down onto the bucket.
T169	Amy	I see, I see, I see the <i>rain</i> .

In T61, Amy wanted to ascertain that the water in the bucket was indeed rain water by asking “Is this, is this the rain?” After the researcher confirmed it, she wanted to know where it came from and how it ended up in the bucket in T163. Realising that the researcher only gave her a partial answer, she decided to come up with her own conclusion in T165 by uttering “And, and then, and then will blocking the broken one ah?” She was probably trying to say that the rain water was leaking from a hole in the roof. She seemed quite interested as while the researcher was explaining she looked around, examining the ceiling. In T169, she exclaimed “I see, I see, I see the rain” when she spotted a drizzle. The noun “rain” was used in T161, T163 and T169 of this excerpt.

i) Dreams

Excerpt 1

Shanti was showing her drawing to the teacher telling her that the alien she drew was from a scary movie shown many years ago. It also somehow reminded of a nightmare she once had. Nigel, who was also drawing at the same table, overheard their conversation and asked her what a nightmare was. The exchange below shows what transpired subsequently.

Date: 1 September 2009 Clip: 2C		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T21	Nigel	What's <i>nightmare</i> ?
T22	Shanti	You don't know what's a <i>nightmare</i> ? A <i>scary dream</i> .
T23	Nigel	Oh.
T24	Shanti	Like okay <i>I'm sleeping and then I'm dreaming</i> . Okay. I am a good girl and then, Imran is a good boy and you a good boy. After that three of us will go, after that we saw Bala and then after that Bala is the bad guy, after that Bala go and <i>kill</i> us and after that we <i>die</i> , then after that huh huh huh huh (pretends to wake up from sleep)... It's just a <i>nightmare</i> .
T25	Imran	Okay, my turn. And then, and then I, and then I can keep Bala then you got ten and then, and then, and then, and then there are all the monster they have sharp nails and they can bite. And then will <i>kill</i> us. <i>Die</i> .

When Nigel asked Shanti what a nightmare was, she gave a brief explanation in T22 “You don’t know what’s a nightmare? A scary dream.” She later decided to elaborate by giving Nigel a longer example in T24 where she came up with a dream sequence in which all three of them were killed by Bala. She used words associated with nightmares such as “sleeping”, “dreaming”, “kill” and “die”. Imran who was attracted by her story also decided to come up with his own story in T25 where they also died as they were killed by monsters. He also used the words “kill” and “die”. It is interesting to note that in both Shanti and Imran’s story death was inevitable, it was as if all nightmares must end with death.

Excerpt 2

It was reading time and Shanti, Kumar, Imran and Bala were instructed by the teacher to get a book and read it in the hallway. Imran and Shanti were reading silently while Kumar who was reading aloud, instructed Bala to read silently when Bala tried to draw his attention to a picture in his book. Shanti then told Kumar that she had a nightmare about him as featured in the excerpt below.

Date: 2 September 2009 Clip: 4		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T12	Shanti	You know... I had a <i>nightmare</i> about you.
T13	Kumar	What?
T14	Shanti	About you.
T15	Kumar	What? What <i>nightmare</i> about me?
T16	Shanti	Wait, when teacher is in the class... I had a <i>nightmare</i> about you.
T17	Bala	There's a fire on the book. There's a fire. Kumar, there's a picture of fire on a man.
T18	Shanti	You were only there. I had a <i>nightmare</i> that you... Someone was there and <i>killed</i> you with a knife. <i>Killed</i> on your heart.
T19	Imran	Ah... Op. (mimics being stabbed and pretends to collapse) But, but, Shanti, Shanti look at my leg. Shanti look at my leg. Shanti look at my leg.
T20	Kumar	There's no robbers in the house. Robbers only come at night.
T21	Shanti	<i>Yalah</i> , it's at night <i>lah</i> .
T22	Imran	Shanti, go down on the stairs.
T23	Kumar	Is tonight the night? You mean you watched a <i>ghost movie</i> ... yesterday?
T24	Shanti	Yes.
T25	Kumar	So that's why you had a <i>nightmare</i> .

In T12, Shanti told Kumar that she had a nightmare about him. When Kumar asked her about her nightmare, she described it to him saying “You were only there. I had a nightmare that you... Someone was there and killed you with a knife. Killed on your heart.” Similar to the previous excerpt, she used the word “killed” and this nightmare of hers also ended with someone’s death. Although both Bala and Imran overheard their conversation, they did not seem to be interested and tried to interrupt Shanti and Kumar’s conversation. Their attempts failed as both Kumar and Shanti ignored them. Kumar was more interested in convincing Shanti that nightmares are not real in T20 when he uttered “There’s no robbers in the house. Robbers only come at night.” It was interesting to note that he assumed that they were robbers although Shanti did not specifically mention who they were in the previous turns. Nevertheless, she told him that the murder did indeed happen at night. And for a brief moment in T23, Kumar seemed to believe her when he said “Is tonight the night?” However, the cause of her

nightmare suddenly occurred to him when he asked “You mean you watched a ghost movie... yesterday?” His guess was accurate as Shanti did watch a ghost movie the day before. In this excerpt, words and phrases such as “nightmare”, “killed” and “ghost movie” were used to describe a dream.

j) Body

Excerpt 1

It was lunch time and Nigel, Shanti as well as Amy were eating and talking to the researcher. In the course of their conversation, Amy burped and this caused Nigel and Shanti to tease her. They remarked that she has a habit of burping, despite the fact that it was the researcher’s first recording session with them. The researcher’s attempt to instil a sense of empathy by indirectly helping them to put themselves in Amy’s situation, led to amusing exchanges on bodily functions, i.e. breaking wind.

Date: 1 September 2009 Clip: 1		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T82	Researcher	<i>Do you fart?</i>
T83	Shanti	(shakes head)
T84	Researcher	Are you sure?
T85	Shanti	(nods) <i>I don’t fart.</i>
T86	Researcher	You don’t?
T87	Shanti	<i>I control it.</i>
T89	Researcher	Then where, where, where does the gas go?
T90	Shanti	<i>Should be inside here lah. It’s sleeping inside.</i>
T91	Researcher	(laughs and asks Nigel) Do you?
T92	Nigel	<i>Yes.</i>
T93	Researcher	At home?
T94	Nigel	<i>Fart but... Ya, at the car also (laughs).</i>
T95	Researcher	In the car.
T96	Shanti	<i>I feel like cannot already, then I was holding, after that, prak! But cannot kemut (contract muscles).</i>

When the researcher asked Shanti whether she broke wind, she shook her head and answered in the negative. As the researcher was not convinced, she probed further.

Shanti stood by her answer and emphasised it by nodding and uttering “I don’t fart” in T85. The verb “fart” was used to describe her bodily function. Sensing the disbelief in the researcher’s subsequent reply, Shanti went on to explain that she was able to control her muscles and prevent the gas from escaping in T87. When asked by the researcher on the whereabouts of the gas, Shanti wondered for a second and with a smile, told the researcher that it stayed within her body. Nigel, on the other hand, was more forthright. When posed with the same question, he not only admitted that he broke wind in T92, but also told the researcher that it normally happens at home and in his family car when he laughingly uttered “Fart but... Ya, at the car also.” His candid admission drew a smile from Shanti who then decided to reveal that there were occasions where she also broke wind as she was unable to hold it. It was interesting to note that in order to describe the act of controlling ones muscle, Shanti used English and Malay verbs like “hold” and “kemut”. “Kemut” is not commonly used among non-Malay children.

k) Relationships

Excerpt 1

Shanti and Kumar were reading in the hallway with a few other preschoolers. Kumar was reading about the Apollo II mission when Shanti interrupted him. She was concerned by the fact that nobody in her family knew him although Kumar claimed that both of them were cousins. The excerpt below illustrates the conversation that followed.

Date: 2 September 2009 Clip: 4		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T59	Shanti	Kumar, my <i>mother</i> doesn’t know you, my <i>father</i> doesn’t know you, my <i>sister</i> doesn’t know you, everybody doesn’t know you. Nobody knows you.
T60	Imran	Hey look.
T61	Shanti	Nobody knows you (unclear).

T62	Kumar	Your <i>mother</i> knows.
T63	Imran	Shanti look, timeline.
T64	Kumar	Because your <i>mother</i> is a <i>relative</i> to me.
T65	Imran	Eh... Kumar, everyone! Look, timeline. Timeline, line.
T66	Kumar	<i>We're cousins. Okay. I'm your cousin on your mother's side, not your father's side. Your father won't know me.</i>
T67	Shanti	No, my <i>mother</i> said, I'm telling my <i>mother</i> eight times. And then she keeps saying, "Are you sure?" "Yes." And then she finally got it lah. Now only she knows.

In T59, Shanti used relationship nouns such as “mother”, “father” and “sister” to refer to her family members whom she claimed do not know Kumar. However, Kumar was confident that Shanti’s mother knew him. In T64, another instance of reference to relationship occurred when he claimed that her mother was his relative. He continued to provide an explanation to Shanti in T66 when he uttered “We’re cousins. Okay. I’m your cousin on your mother’s side, not your father’s side. Your father won’t know me”. He also used relationship nouns such as “cousin”, “mother” and “father”. He managed to convince Shanti as she then told him how she managed to convince her mother after eight attempts. Imran was more interested in his book than in their conversation and made a few attempts to gain their attention. However, his attempts failed.

l) Money

Excerpt 1

The teacher began the day’s lesson by teaching the preschoolers about space. She was describing an asteroid and the potential damage that an asteroid would cause if it were to crash on earth. This stirred the preschoolers’ imagination and they began to talk about it in the excerpt below.

Date: 2 September 2009		Group: 1
Clip: 3		
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T88	Teacher Jessie	Well you need millions of dollars to be able to go and sit in the...

T89	Imran	Rocket.
T90	Teacher Jessie	The rocket, the space ship, to go...
T91	Kumar	<i>One thousand?</i>
T92	Teacher Jessie	Yes...
T93	Yusri	<i>One hundred thousand?</i>
T94	Teacher Jessie	Some people pay you know...
T95	Yusri	Teacher is it <i>one hundred thousand ringgit?</i>
T96	Teacher Jessie	More than that. Have you got one hundred thousand ringgit?
T97	Kumar	I have. If I can get my parents to give me.

When the teacher told the preschoolers that they needed to pay millions of ringgits to go to space, they could not imagine how huge the amount was. Although they knew that it involved a lot of money, as it was beyond their understanding. Kumar thought it was around the range of one thousand ringgit as it was the biggest amount he could think of. Yusri mentioned a bigger amount but he probably did understand how much that involved either. Kumar added that he could probably get a thousand ringgit, if only he could convince his parents to part with their money.

Excerpt 2

Nigel, Zhi Eng as well as Kuldeep were playing indoors after lunch. Nigel was playing with his building block, while Kudeep was playing with toy soldiers until they noticed that Zhi Eng was having a few toy guns. Both of them tried to coax and persuade him to give them some of his guns but he refused. Undeterred, they resorted to bidding for it as shown in the excerpt below.

Date: 24 March 2010 Clip: 12		Group: 2
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T66	Kuldeep	I give you, <i>nine hundred and fifty six infinity</i> .
T67	Nigel	No he give you <i>one dollar</i> only.
T68	Kuldeep	(laughs) I give you <i>one dollar</i> , ting. <i>Five dollar</i> , ting.
T69	Nigel	I give you...
T70	Kuldeep	This is mine lah.
T71	Nigel	I give you <i>two hundred</i> .
T72	Zhi Eng	<i>Two hundred</i> , no.

T73	Kuldeep	I give you <i>five hundred</i> .
T74	Nigel	I give you <i>six hundred</i> .
T75	Kuldeep	I give you <i>one hundred</i> to buy that from him.

Nigel and Kuldeep were trying to convince Zhi Eng to part with some of his guns. Both of them decided to bid for the gun, trying to outdo each other at every turn. They did not seem to have fully grasped the understanding of the value of money as the amounts they offered were inconsistent. It began with a large amount and was reduced to RM100 towards the end of the bidding. They did not seem to mind as they seemed to be bidding for the fun of it. Zhi Eng too probably noticed that they were not serious as he was not convinced and walked away.

m) Death

Excerpt 1

The teacher began the day's lesson by teaching the preschoolers about space. She was describing an asteroid and the potential damage that an asteroid would cause if it were to crash on earth. This stirred the preschoolers' imagination and they began to talk about it as can be seen in the following excerpt.

Date: 2 September 2009 Clip: 3		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T51	Imran	And then, um... it will... crash our house right?
T52	Shanti	Or...
T53	Teacher Jessie	Ya, it will... Remember if it falls on your house how?
T54	Imran	Bom! Nowhere to live.
T55	Shanti	Or if you are in your farm, the, the farm animals should hide right?
T56	Teacher Jessie	Yes, I hope so.
T57	Imran	They will <i>die</i> .
T58	Kumar	They will <i>die</i> , they might <i>die</i> , the farm animals.

Imran imagined that if an asteroid were to crash in his house, he would be homeless as it would be destroyed from the impact. Shanti, on the other hand, was more concerned

about farm animals. She somehow felt that they had the ability to detect falling asteroids and hide for their own safety. Kumar and Imran, however, were more realistic. They both felt that the animals had little or even no chance of surviving the impact. The word “die” was used in T57 and T58 of this excerpt.

Excerpt 2

It was reading time and Kumar and Shanti were each reading a book on their own. While reading a book on space, Kumar discovered that the universe would be filled with light in three billion years’ time. He decided to share this information with Shanti. Although the book did not state the impact of this phenomenon on planet earth as well as its inhabitant, both Kumar and Shanti seemed a bit concerned. The excerpt below displays the subsequent exchanges.

Date: 2 September 2009 Clip: 4		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T87	Kumar	Shanti this will all happen.
T88	Shanti	Where?
T89	Kumar	This, this will happen after three billion years.
T90	Shanti	<i>Oh oh. Okay, we’ll pass away that time right?</i>
T91	Kumar	Erm... when were we born? Of course lah. three thousand four thousand something. Four thousand, four thousand one.
T92	Shanti	(wipes imaginary sweat off forehead) Oh. I’m still reading the first page you know, ‘cause there’s much of it. There, it’s until here only, so many.

Earlier on, Kumar had informed Shanti that the universe will be filled with lights three billion years later. Although Shanti responded by asking him when this is expected to occur in T88, he did not answer her question but instead repeated his earlier statement. Realising that it was an event that was going to happen in the distant future, Shanti asked Kumar in T90 if they would have died by then when she uttered “Oh oh. Okay, we’ll pass away that time right?” She was able to use the phrasal verb “pass away”

instead of the verb “die” to refer to death. Kumar, upon making a quick mental calculation of their age as well as his estimated occurrence of this phenomenon, answered in the affirmative. Shanti was relieved and turn her attention to the book she was reading.

n) Books/magazines

Excerpt 1

Amy, Yu Han, Zhi Eng, Ben and Nigel stayed indoors after having their lunch and shower. They were seated around the table, looking at the magazine Amy brought. It was Nigel’s turn, so he was given the privilege of flipping through it while the rest looked. Cindy arrived a while later and began to enquire about the book. The ensuing exchange is shown in the following excerpt.

Date: 25 March 2010 Clip: 21		Group: 2
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T44	Cindy	Amy, whose <i>book</i> is this?
T45	Amy	My one.
T46	Cindy	Can I see the <i>picture</i> ? (tries to grab book)
T47	Ben	Cindy!
T48	Nigel	This one not nice.
T49	Cindy	This is old one but I don’t say because I must see first. Oh, this one I already got... But if you buy <i>magazine</i> you have to <i>read</i> it, no, don’t just see only the <i>pictures</i> right? Right or not? You must <i>read</i> Nigel.

In T44, Cindy enquired about the ownership of the magazine by uttering “Amy, whose book is this?” and found out that it belonged to Amy. Although she asked for permission to have a look at the book in T46, she tried to grab the book before anyone could respond and was reprimanded by Ben. After her failed attempt, she tried to grab the book again but Nigel did not allow her to. In T49, Cindy went on to lecture them on the importance of reading the magazine instead of just looking at its pictures. Realising

that they were ignoring her, she turned to Nigel and gently hit him with a soft toy in order to get his attention. Nouns that were related to books/magazines topic category such as “book”, “picture”, “picture” and “magazine” and the verb “read” were found in this excerpt.

0) Religion

Excerpt 1

Kumar, Imran and Shanti were instructed by their teacher to read some books in the hallway. Kumar came across a page on gods and discovered a picture and brief description of the Hindu god, Vishnu. He decided to share this information with Shanti and Imran as featured in the excerpt below.

Date: 2 September 2009 Clip: 4		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T97	Kumar	Eh Vishnu is my <i>god</i> .
T98	Imran	Where?
T99	Kumar	Vishnu.
T100	Imran	Oh.
T101	Shanti	Vishnu is my sister’s friend, name.
T102	Kumar	No, Vishnu is a <i>god</i> .
T103	Shanti	Vishnu, is a girl’s name, was it?
T104	Kumar	Ya, everybody will tell you that Vishnu is a <i>god</i> . Vishnu is a boy’s name.

In T97, Kumar uttered “Eh, Vishnu is my god” when he unexpectedly came across a picture of the Hindu god, Vishnu, in the book he was reading. Imran was curious and wanted to know how Vishnu looked like whereas Shanti told Kumar that her sister has a friend by the name of Vishnu. In T102, Kumar disagreed and said “No, Vishnu is a god” as he probably felt that Vishnu was a name reserved exclusively for his god. Although Shanti insisted that it is a girl’s name, Kumar stood his ground and reiterated

that Vishnu is a male divine being and therefore it is a name more suitable for boys. In this excerpt, the noun “god” was used to refer one of the deities of the Hindu religion.

p) Weapons/soldiers

Excerpt 1

After lunch, Kuldeep, Nigel and Zhi Eng were playing imaginary war games in the indoor play area. Kudeep was playing with three toy soldiers, while Nigel observed him. Zhi Eng, on the other hand, was playing with a soft toy and toy guns. The excerpt below illustrates their verbal exchanges.

Date: 24 March 2010 Clip: 12		Group: 2
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T25	Kuldeep	One is for up, one is for sitting down. One is for up, one is for sitting down. And one is for <i>shooting</i> .
T26	Nigel	<i>Shoot</i> the butt.
T27	Kuldeep	Phoom! (laughs)
T28	Nigel	(laughs) Bangay, bangay, bangay, bangay...
T29	Kuldeep	I got three <i>soldiers</i> already.
T30	Nigel	Give me. I, I show you.
T31	Kuldeep	No I don't want. You go and take your own one. Hello... Two cannot fit inside <i>lah</i> .

While playing with three toy soldiers, Kuldeep uttered that “One is for up, one is for sitting down. One is for up, one is for sitting down” in T25. He was arranging them on the table when Nigel suggested that he use one of the standing soldiers to shoot the one lying on the ground. Kuldeep complied and his action amused both him and Nigel. However, when Nigel wanted to play with his soldiers, Kuldeep refused and asked Nigel to get his own. Nigel then continued to play with his own toys. Later, Kuldeep saw that Zhi Eng was trying to attach two guns to his toy elephant and told him that they were too big to fit. Zhi Eng, however, ignored him and continued with what he

was doing. Words related to the weapons/soldiers topic category such as “shooting”, “shoot” and “soldiers” were used in this excerpt.

q) Trees/flowers/plants

Excerpt 1

It was a book reading session about natural phenomena and the teacher had explained to the preschoolers about earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, tornados, weather, climate as well as mountains and caves. When they arrived at the topic of saving the planet, the teacher asked the preschoolers to suggest ways of saving the planet.

Date: 2 September 2009 Clip: 3		Group: 1
Turn	Participant	Utterance
T539	Kumar	By <i>not cutting down trees</i> .
T540	Teacher Jessie	Yes?
T541	Kumar	<i>Not cutting down trees</i> .
T542	Teacher Jessie	Not cutting down trees, that will help our planet.
T543	Nigel	And then not to throw rubbish.
T544	Teacher Jessie	Not to hurt animals and not to throw rubbish on the streets.
T545	Nigel	I said that just now.
T546	Teacher Jessie	Hm, yes, that’s what you said. Yes?
T547	Bala	And not to waste food.
T548	Teacher Jessie	Yes, what else? How else can you save our planet?
T549	Imran	<i>Cannot pick flowers</i> .

There were a few suggestions and it was interesting to note that most of them were presented in the form of don’ts instead of dos. For instance in T539 and T541, Kumar proposed that the cutting of tree be stopped. He was followed by Nigel who suggested that people should stop throwing rubbish indiscriminately. Another preschooler, Bala, said that people should stop wasting food, while Imran felt that people shouldn’t be allowed to pluck flowers in T549. Both “Not cutting down trees” and “Cannot pick flowers” fell under the trees/flowers/plants topic category. It was interesting to note that some preschoolers were aware of the importance of preserving nature.

4.3 Discussion of the Findings

The 10 most frequently referenced categories were retrieved after detailed analyses were conducted on the respective referential frames. The frequency of topic categories referenced according to percentage is presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Frequency of Topic Categories Referenced According to Percentage

Time	%	Person	%	Content	%
Present	31.6	No Person	11.6	Actions/positions/personal information	6.5
Past	1.0	Self	11.1	Play	4.0
Fantasy	0.4	Peer	8.4	Movies/cartoons	3.8
Future	0.4	Others	0.8	Descriptions	2.2
Total	33.4	We	0.5	Space	1.6
		Parent	0.3	Toys	1.6
		Teacher	0.3	Places/locations	1.3
		Researcher	0.2	People	1.0
		Sibling	0.1	Words/numbers	1.0
		Helper	0.1	Animals/insects	0.9
		Family/relatives	0.04	Utensils/equipment/tools	0.9
		Total	33.44	Books/magazines	0.9
				Colours	0.9
				Food/drinks	0.8
				Traits/conditions/skills	0.8
				Vehicle	0.7
				Body	0.7
				Weapons/soldiers	0.7
				Time	0.4
				Lessons/homework	0.4
				Social/greeting	0.3
				Natural phenomena	0.3
				Dreams	0.2
				Furniture/household appliances	0.2
				Miscellaneous	0.2
				Clothes	0.1
				Grooming	0.1
Money	0.1				
Death	0.1				
Relationships	0.04				
Total	32.74				

Out of a total of 48 categories that were referenced, the 10 most common conversation topics in terms of the referential frames of Time, Person and Content are

1. Present (31.6%)
2. No person (11.6%)
3. Self (11.1%)
4. Peer (8.4%)
5. Actions/positions/personal information (6.5%)
6. Being playful (4%)
7. Movies/cartoons (3.8%)
8. Descriptions (2.2%)
9. Space (1.6%) and Toys (1.6%)

These topic categories appear to revolve around the time frame, objects, persons (including the preschooler), behaviours and subjects that are most relevant to an urban Malaysian preschooler and provide a database from which a preschooler draws upon to present her/himself as an individual, a source of information that is used to answer questions along the lines of “Tell me about yourself”. Based on the findings, when having a conversation with a preschooler, one would probably discover that although preschoolers are not egocentric, they tend to talk more about themselves. This is due to their emerging sense of self and their growing sense of belonging to their families and community, which signifies their increasing need to be connected to themselves and others.

Additionally, these topic categories did not co-occur with any particular activity or contexts such as drawing time, reading time, mealtime, activity time and playtime. For instance, although Clips 2 (drawing time), 3 (reading time) and 4 (reading time) had

conversations with all four time frame topic categories, it would be inaccurate to conclude that drawing and reading activities encouraged talked on various time frames. This is due to the fact that Clip 2 was the only clip recording during drawing time whereas other clips recorded during reading time (Clips 6, 7, 10, 13, 14 and 21) did not contain conversation with all four time frame topic categories. Additionally, future topic categories were found in all five contexts, which meant that preschoolers were capable of talking about the future while participating in a variety of activities. Similarly, there were no clear and consistent patterns between the referencing of Person and Content frame topic categories and the context. This is most likely due to the nature child conversations, which are unplanned, random and unpredictable.

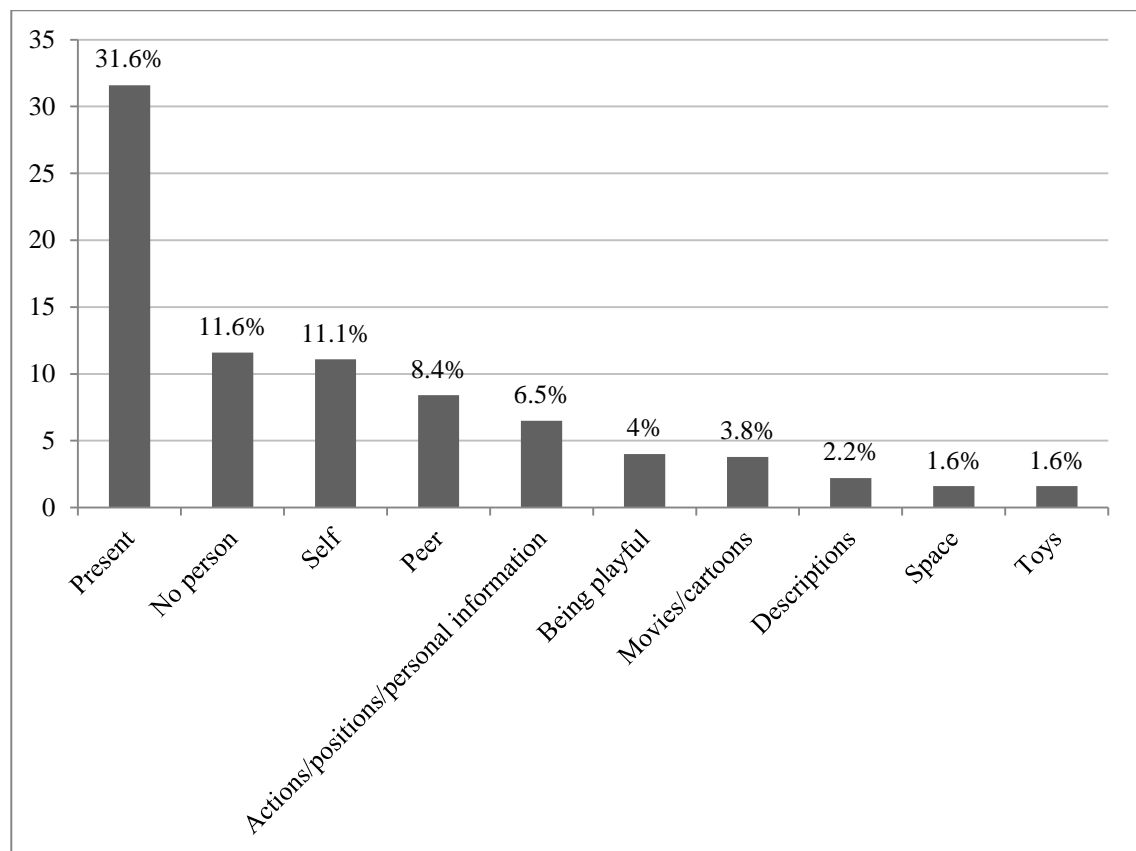
The 10 most commonly referenced topic categories constituted approximately 83.7% of the overall categories referenced, whereas the remaining 38 categories, had frequencies ranging from 1% to 0.04%. The analysis also showed that the Time, Person and Content frames each made up about one third of the total categories referenced.

4.4 Summary

Data analysis revealed the Time, Person and Content frame topic categories as well as their frequency of reference by preschoolers. Findings showed that preschoolers tend to focus on the present, inanimate things and non-human beings, themselves, their peers, and the actions and personal information of themselves and others as shown in Figure 4.4. They also indulged in playful and descriptive talk and conversed about matters related to movies, cartoons, space and toys. Additionally, the study showed that preschoolers were able to initiate, maintain, shift and shape conversation topics in order to meet their needs.

Figure 4.4

Ten Topic Categories Most Referenced by Urban Malaysian Preschoolers



Apart from concurring with the findings of previous studies, which state that preschoolers talk mainly about the present as well as themselves, this study also showed that their conversations also revolved around grooming matters, social greetings, people, words/numbers, cartoon, movie and imaginary characters, natural phenomena, dreams, time, space, body, relationships, money, death, books/magazines, religion, gender, lessons/homework, weapons/soldiers, trees/flowers/plants, furniture/household appliances, colours, descriptions and miscellaneous things. The inclination to converse about these topics can be attributed to preschoolers' varying personal aptitude, background as well as the ability to handle topics, which involves linguistics, cognitive and social factors (Foster, 1985).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter sums up this study on the conversational topics of urban Malaysian preschoolers. In order to achieve the central aim, the researcher combined and adapted the frameworks used by Marvin et al. (1994) and Tönsing (2001) and devised qualitative as well as quantitative methods to code and analyse the data. The following sections contain a summary of the findings, implications and limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and ends with a conclusion.

5.2 Summary of the Findings

The researcher embarked on this study with the aim of obtaining answers for the following research questions:

1. What are the conversational topics of urban Malaysian preschoolers in terms of the referential frames of Time, Person and Content?
2. Which conversational topics, in terms of the referential frames of Time, Person and Content are most frequently referenced by urban Malaysian preschoolers?

The answer to Research Question 1 was obtained by transcribing the data and coding each utterance according to the topic categories under the referential frames of Time, Person and Content. These topic categories were adapted and extended according to the context of the current study. The findings demonstrated that a total of 48 categories were referenced by the preschoolers in this study and are as shown below:

Time Frame

1. Present
2. Past
3. Future
4. Fantasy

Person Frame

1. Self
2. Peer
3. We
4. Parent
5. Sibling
6. Family/relatives
7. Teacher
8. Researcher
9. Helper
10. Others
11. No person

Content Frame

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. Toys | 17. Dreams |
| 2. Food/drinks | 18. Time |
| 3. Animals/insects | 19. Space |
| 4. Utensils/equipment/tools | 20. Body |
| 5. Clothes | 21. Relationships |
| 6. Vehicles | 22. Money |
| 7. Places/locations | 23. Death |
| 8. Actions/positions/personal information | 24. Books/magazines |
| 9. Traits/conditions/skills | 25. Religion |
| 10. Social/greeting | 26. Gender |
| 11. Grooming | 27. Lessons/homework |
| 12. People | 28. Weapons/soldiers |
| 13. Being playful | 29. Trees/flowers/plants |
| 14. Words/numbers | 30. Furniture/household appliances |
| 15. Movies/cartoons | 31. Colours |
| 16. Natural phenomena | 32. Descriptions |
| | 33. Miscellaneous |

The answer to Research Question 2 was obtained by calculating the frequency of each topic category and dividing it by the total utterance to find its average frequency. As a result, the 10 categories that were referenced most frequently were Present (31.6%), No person (11.6%), Self (11.1%), Peer (8.4%), Actions/positions/personal information

(6.5%), Being playful (4%), Movies/cartoons (3.8%), Descriptions (2.2%), Space (1.6%) and Toys (1.6%).

In addition to the research questions, the researcher presented a number of assumptions at the beginning of the study, which is verified in the following paragraphs.

1. Did urban Malaysian preschoolers' conversations revolve around toys?

Yes. The "Toys" topic category was among the 10 most frequently referenced topic categories and had a frequency of 1.6% overall. They talked about toys such as action figures (soldiers and Mr Incredible), weapons (guns, knife and sword), soft toys (puppy, crocodile and elephant), construction and assembling toys (Lego blocks) as well as educational toys (picture-word match puzzles).

2. Did urban Malaysian preschoolers' conversations revolve around video games or electronic game gadgets?

No. There was no mention of video games and electronic gadgets in the present study. This was probably due to a number of reasons. Firstly, preschoolers tend to talk about tangible items and probably since there were no electronic game gadgets in the preschool, they did not talk about them. Secondly, it was a mixed group in terms of age, gender and interest. Since boys are more interested in video games and electronic gadgets compared to girls, they would most probably need male counterparts who shared their interest in order to talk about it.

3. Did urban Malaysian preschoolers' conversations revolve around themselves – their personal information, likes and dislikes, possessions and their homes?

Yes. The “Self” topic category ranked third overall and had a frequency of 11.1%. They talked about themselves – their favourite colours, food, fruits, animal, holiday destinations, planets and movie/cartoon characters, their possessions, their emotions, their abilities as well as the things they do at home such as attending private lessons or tuition.

4. Did urban Malaysian preschoolers' conversations revolve around parents, siblings, grandparents, other caregivers (nannies/babysitters), relatives, neighbours, teachers or peers, especially those whom they are close to and/or interact with regularly?

Yes. They talked about their grandparents (grandmother), parents (their phone numbers and occupations), siblings (sister's name and birth year), relatives (aunt and cousins), teachers and peers (friends). Overall, the “Peer” topic category ranked 4th with a frequency of 8.4%, both the “Parent” and “Teacher” topic categories were ranked 17th with a frequency of 0.3%, the “Sibling” topic category was ranked 19th with a frequency of 0.1%, and the “Family/relatives” topic category was ranked 20th with a frequency of 0.04%. However, there was no mention of other caregivers and neighbours.

5. Did urban Malaysian preschoolers' conversations revolve around cartoon and characters from movies, cartoons, comic books as well as children's programmes?

Yes. They talked about movie, cartoon and comic book characters such as aliens, monsters, UFO, Ben 10, XLR8, princes and princesses, Little Mermaid, Snow White and Cinderella. The movies/cartoons topic category ranked 7th overall with a frequency of 3.8%. Nonetheless, they did not refer to any children's programme.

Based on the answers above, a majority of the researcher's assumptions appears to be supported by the findings. The current study also supports the study by Marvin et al. (1994) which proved that preschoolers mainly referenced the present and themselves. However, it also found that urban Malaysians preschoolers also frequently referenced non-human subjects. While the study identified some of the conversational topics of urban Malaysian preschoolers, more extensive and comprehensive investigations are required to produce a more representative and conclusive result.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

It is recommended that further research be conducted in a larger scale in terms of the number of preschoolers. Ideally, they should comprise a balanced ratio of different age groups from both genders of all the ethnic groups in Malaysia, which could also provide data for cross-cultural studies. Future investigations on urban Malaysian preschoolers' conversational topics as well as their ability to initiate, maintain, shift and shade topics should be carried out for longer durations in various settings such as preschools of different language streams nationwide in order to obtain a more accurate and comprehensive picture of the repertoire of preschoolers' conversational skills.

The use of more sophisticated recording equipment and software would help tremendously in the collection and transcription of data. For instance, portable lavalier microphones can be fastened on each preschooler and used to record their conversations as they go about their daily routines. Additionally, electronic devices such as portable voice-activated audio recorders and video recorders can be used to capture not only preschoolers' verbal language but also their body language, which plays an important role in their communication with others. If possible, instead of doing manual transcriptions, future researchers should use transcription software such as Transana, Elan, Transcriber, Express Scribe and Praat as they would significantly reduce the time needed to transcribe conversations.

5.4 Conclusion

This exploratory study has achieved its aim of analysing the topics occurring in urban Malaysian preschoolers' conversations in the preschool setting. While more studies of this nature is required to fill the current gap, the present study contributes to it by providing not only an actual picture of urban Malaysian preschoolers' topic selections and elaborations, but also the time frame, persons and objects that interest them. This information may help parents, child care professionals, educators in the building and maintenance of their interpersonal relationships with preschoolers.

As mentioned at the beginning of this study, while somewhat speculative, the findings are capable of contributing to the field of education by helping curriculum designers and educators to design preschool curriculums in languages such as English, Bahasa Malaysia, Mandarin and Tamil with contents that are relevant as well as mentally and physically stimulating to Malaysian preschoolers. Additionally, considering the fact

that the study analysed preschoolers' communicative speech, the results can serve as a gauge of the level of urban Malaysian preschoolers' communicative competence, which can be used to evaluate the language, psychological and social development of Malaysian children within the same age group. It can also be potentially useful to augmentative and alternative communication professionals in the development of a system to assist Malaysian children with expressive communication disorders.