

## CHAPTER I

### THE STUDY

#### INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the role of imitation in second language development by looking at the general similarities in the subject's reproduction of an adult's verbal descriptions of some pictures ( refer to *procedure* section in Chapter III). Subject's second language development is studied by looking at the similarities in content, syntax and lexicon (generally noun) produced by the child in the post-description transcript to the content, syntax and lexicon which the adult presented in the model-description transcript (refer to Appendix 1).

A significant number of past studies (e.g., Skinner, 1957; Fraser et al. 1963; Brown and Bellugi, 1964; Cazden, 1965; Bandura and Harris, 1966; Lovell and Dixon, 1967; Slobin, 1968; Carol et al., 1969; Baratz, 1969; Rosenthal and Whitebook, 1970; Bloom et al., 1974; Rees, 1975; Whitehurst and Vasta, 1975) have dealt with the role of imitation in acquiring the first language. As an extension to these past studies, the present study is conducted for the reason to find out the role of imitation in second language acquisition.

Brown and Bellugi (1964) and Brown et al. (1968) in their studies on the role of imitation in first language acquisition suggested that as a child's age increases, he tends to imitate less (refer to Chapter II, p.12 ). In order to find out whether or not this suggestion holds true with learners in second language acquisition, an older child above three years old has been deliberately selected as the subject in this case study.

In language imitation study, other than the imitator, it is equally important to study a language model who is normally an adult, from whom a child imitates. As suggested by Vygotsky's (1978) theory, adults would naturally provide cognitive structure and organisational model of language to children with whom they interact. His theory further suggests that this adult-child interaction would help a child to internally develop various language processes which would aid the child to concretise his language system. Therefore, Vygotsky's (1978) theory would be the basis in finding out the extent to which a child's second language could develop through imitation from an adult's verbal language involvement.

Imitation carries various different meanings. The review of past studies on imitation in first language acquisition indicated that the concept of imitation varied from one study to another. Among the concepts are selective and progressive imitation (e. g., Ryan, 1973; Bloom, Hood, & Lightbown, 1974; Moerk & Moerk, 1979; Stine & Bohannon, 1983), imitation-reduction (e.g., Shapiro et al., 1970), imitation-expansion, imitation-reconstruction or delayed imitation (e.g., Shapiro,

Roberts, & Fish, 1970; Clark, 1974, 1977), immediate and exact imitation (e.g., Fraser et al., 1963; Lovell & Dixon, 1967; Brown & Bellugi, 1964), imitation-reinforcement (e.g., Skinner, 1957; Sloane & MacAulay, 1968; Whitehurst, 1971; Whitehurst & Vasta, 1975) and elicited imitation (e.g., Menyuk, 1963; Baratz, 1969; Smith, 1970; Huisingh, Jorgensen & Barrett, 1971). (refer to Chapter II for further details).

In this particular study, imitation in second language is said to occur when there is any similarity between subject's transcript and adult's transcript of a description of a similar set of pictures (refer to *procedure* section in Chapter III) from the aspects of content, syntax and lexicon (refer to *method of analysis* section in Chapter III).

First language imitation studies (e.g., Fraser et al., 1963; Lovell & Dixon, 1969; Sloane & MacAulay, 1968) have shown that children could successfully learn language through imitation. Therefore, it is reasonably prudent to explore this method further as to find more concrete evidence pertaining to the use of imitation to aid second language learning and development.

Freedle, Keeney, and Smith (1970) and Chomsky (1964) suggested that in first language acquisition, children's imitation of sentences could provide useful information about their competence and imitation could also be used systematically as a tool for testing specific hypotheses about the rules children know. Perhaps, the study on imitation would provide the same information and act as a tool for second language teaching and learning.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION**

The research question for this study is as follows:

How does imitation contribute to a child's second language development in terms of content, syntax and lexicon?