

CHAPTER III

SUBJECT

The subjects for this study comprise a boy, Mohammad Amnan Amani Bin Mohammad Fauzi, aged 4 years and 5 months and his mother who is also the researcher served as a language model to him in this study.

The subject is the first born in his family. His parents are both college graduates. Apart from Bahasa Melayu, both parents frequently speak in English to the child.

At the time this study was carried out, the child had gone to a kindergarten for about two weeks. However, Bahasa Malaysia is the only language used at the kindergarten.

His exposure in English comes from his parents who speak in English to him as well as from television English programmes that he watches daily. Based on the researcher's preliminary observation, the child seemed to be picking up some structures and lexicon from what he heard from the English programmes on television. He even tried to imitate the native speakers' speech which he obtained from watching the English movies and would normally attempt to do immediate and exact copying of the word, phrases or sentences that caught his ears.

However, syntactically, he seemed to have difficulties in the exact copying of sentences that he attempted to imitate. Nevertheless, he is able to produce intelligible speech in English but with quite a limited vocabulary especially in naming objects and some difficulties in forming the correct sentence structures in the second language.

PROCEDURES

The study was carried out over a period of five days. On the first day, the child was shown a set of picture series comprising 23 pictures in the form of multicoloured drawings which were taken from a book with illustrations by Martin Aitchison (refer to Appendix 2). A large number of pictures were deliberately given to the child so as to ensure that his post-description is not a result of memorised description but instead an indication of his actual comprehension competence and a true reflection of his grammatical skills and his ability to recall and use the new vocabulary (nouns) appropriately. In addition, a large range of pictures ensured that variety of language forms would be elicited. Also, this would avoid the possibility that the child may, when instructed, imitate constructions which he does not comprehend (Braine & Rodd, 1970).

The picture series was taken from a simple story book, *The Ladybird Key Words Reading Scheme*, which was bought for the child. In the book each picture illustrates a different activity done by the same boy and girl who are the main characters throughout the book. The book was primarily selected for this study due to the nature of its pictures which contained a combination of pictures requiring both simple and complex descriptions. Assuming that re-describing the pictures involves operations of perception, attention and memory, therefore, it was predicted that the difficulty of describing the pictures would be virtually similar from picture to picture.

The study was carried out in three stages. The first stage was the pre-describing stage where the child described the supporting stimuli (a set of picture series) on his own. This was conducted on the first day of the experimental period. The second stage was the actual description stage involving the researcher describing the pictures to the child. Subject was not asked to repeat the description instead merely listen to it. This was conducted in the period of three days. The part of the study was the post-describing stage where the child was told to re describe the pictures on his own. The transcript for the three describing sessions were only transcribed after the whole experiment was completed as to avoid any influence of the child's pre-description transcript on the actual description.

During the pre-description session, the child's mother who is also the researcher, asked the child to describe each picture with only one instructive question (e.g., Can you tell mama about this picture.) for each picture and this was tape recorded on a single session so as to obtain the child's current language level.

On the second day, one third of the pictures was described to the child and another one third on the third day and the rest on the fourth day. The 23 pictures were not described in a single session so as to prevent the child from being confused with too much information. Furthermore, considering his age, his attention span might not be more than twenty minutes. Hence, the child's mother spent not more than twenty minutes on each day describing the pictures to the child. Therefore, if the child was forced to listen, his memory might be saturated and further description would be filtered and possible imitation might not take place. This could have an adverse affect on his post-description.

A fixed description (refer to actual description in Appendix 1) was used in describing the pictures to subject. The actual description was selective in nature. It did not describe every detail in the pictures. Only actions and objects which the researcher considered as obvious were included in the actual description without forgetting the inclusion of simple and complex descriptions.

During the three day treatment period, for each session, the child was not asked to repeat his mother's description instead he was asked to only listen. This is because the aim of the study is not on immediate imitation. Another reason

is that, if the child was asked to repeat after his mother for every description, it was feared that his post-description might be the outcome of memorised description due to drills. This would again affect the findings and cause difficulty in determining whether or not his language had actually developed through imitation.

The child, however, was allowed to ask questions about the pictures and the mother would repeat certain descriptions when the child asked the mother to do so during the three day period. In the effort to make this study resemble a natural language setting, the child was not prevented from asking questions or asking the mother to repeat certain descriptions.

On the fifth day, the child's descriptions of the pictures were tape-recorded. Initially, the same instructive question as in the child's pre-description session was planned to be similarly imposed before each description. However, since the child seemed to be familiar with the describing session, he described the pictures on his own when the tape recording began.

The child's post-describing session was conducted on the fifth day because if it was delayed, his post-description might be affected by other factors such as the possibility that his linguistic development could be influenced by other sources, such as his father's involvement (which was inevitable) in describing the same pictures. This could cause ambiguity and misleading findings because the child's post-description transcript would be compared to his mother's actual description transcript and not his father's.

In order to control the effect of other variables such as time and distraction from others during the tape recording session, both the pre-describing session and the post-describing session were held about an hour before the child's bed time where the child seemed to be participative and enthusiastic. The recording sessions for both pre- and post-describing were conducted in the same room with the mother and the child alone. There were no toys around so to ensure that the child was not distracted by them.

The same pictures were used in both pre- and post-describing as well as in the actual description. This is done on purpose as to enable the comparison of syntax similarities between the child's transcript and adult's transcript. The actual description was independent of the description provided by the writer of this simple story book.

Furthermore, since this study focus on noun acquisition through imitation, the same pictures were considered the most appropriate to be used in looking at similarities in noun usage especially in terms of meaning as suggested in the actual description by adult (refer to Appendix 1).

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The data collected were transcribed and analysed by comparing the child's pre-description transcript and post-description transcript to his mother's actual description transcript in the following aspects:

- a) content
- b) syntax
- c) lexicon

A) CONTENT

The content analysis was based on Homzie et al.'s (1975) reproduction rating. This rating of content was used by Homzie and others in scoring the content of stories used in their study. Since this study is also using stories as stimuli, therefore, this rating of content seemed reasonably suitable.

The criteria of this rating of content are as follows:-

- a) 5 points

-the relations in the story and relevant contexts are preserved even though changes in wording occur

b) 4 points

-a substitution occurs which is related to the original content but inadequate or important segment of the story is deleted

c) 3 points

-unrelated substitution occurs or meaning is changed but not completely altered

d) 2 points

-a major portion of the story is deleted with no presupposition present or meaning is drastically altered

e) 1 point

-only word fragments from the original story are present, and none of the meaning is present

f) 0 point

-story is not reproduced

B) SYNTAX

Syntactical development was analysed quantitatively and qualitatively by looking at the word ordering in the child's sentences in his post-description transcript in comparison to the actual description transcript by the adult. MLU was calculated based on Cazden's (1965) calculation of MLU whereby repetitions, false starts, nonsentential expressions, replies such as 'okay', calls such as 'hey' and counting were excluded in calculating the child's MLU.

Latency to full sentence production was obtained by comparing the frequency of repetitive phrasal utterances (such as 'The girl...') in the child's pre- and post-description transcripts. Syntactical development was also assessed by comparing the frequency of incomplete sentences (such as 'The boy goes to.....') in the child's pre-description and post-description transcript in terms of long-description pictures and short-description pictures. Long-description pictures comprise more than two sentences whereas short description pictures comprise one or two sentences.

Correlation coefficient, mean and average deviation of both the pre-description and the post-description in terms of frequency of articles, frequency of verbs and frequency of nouns are calculated as to find out the extent to which the child's mother serves as a language model to the child by comparing the above measures between the child's and the model's.

In constructing the frequency table, the operationalised items are coded as follows:

- a. fA_{se} - frequency of article in subject's pre-description
- b. fV_{se} - frequency of verb in subject's pre-description
- c. fN_{se} - frequency of noun in subject's pre-description
- d. fA_m - frequency of article in adult's description
- e. fV_m - frequency of verb in adult's description
- f. fN_m - frequency of noun in adult's description
- g. fA_{st} - frequency of article in subject's post-description
- h. fV_{st} - frequency of verb in subject's post-description
- i. fN_{st} - frequency of noun in subject's post-description

C) LEXICON

The focus of lexical development in this study was primarily on nouns. The verbs were analysed in explaining syntax development. Since an older child above three years old was assumed to somehow have developed his language system (even though a second language), he was predicted to imitate nouns more than verbs. For this reason, focus on lexical development was attributed to only nouns.

Lexical development was qualitatively analysed by comparing the child's pre-description transcript to his post-description transcript. If a new vocabulary item emerged in his post-description transcript which is not in the pre-description transcript, this post-description transcript would then be compared to the actual description transcript. When the same noun appeared in both the actual description transcript and the child's post-description transcript with the correct intended usage as suggested in the actual description transcript, the child was concluded as to have developed lexically through imitation.

Qualitative analysis for content and syntax was carried out by comparing the content of the pre-description transcript and the content of the post- and actual description transcripts.