



Conversation Stations and Children First Language Acquisition: A Case Study of a Four-Year-Old Child

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Abstract— Talking meaningfully and listening attentively to a child can be challenging for some. The practices, however, are pivotal to have children develop linguistically. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to study the impact of the implementation of conversation stations on a child language acquisition. This is a qualitative research which aims to explain a child's linguistic phenomenon. The linguistic aspects studied were designed in basic mental entities, covering naming objects, attributes and modifier, event, and attribute, modifier, and evaluation of the event. A four year and two-month old child as a participant engaged in the conversation stations and his utterances were noted for data selection and data analysis. This was helpful to recognize, identify, analyse, and draw a conclusion about how the child language acquisition was influenced by the implementation of the conversation stations. The current research demonstrates that the child is able to name the objects and later modify them properly, describe the events, and subsequently evaluate them, using more complex sentences instead of employing subject plus verb only and providing logical reasoning behind the arguments. It indicates that the conversation stations carry a meaningful practice to his oral language proficiency.

Keywords— conversation stations; language acquisition; listen; son; talk

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I. INTRODUCTION

Building a meaningful conversation with a child remains the case for some parents. The increasing number of technological devices in use can be a contributing factor to the quality time decrease within a family. On the one hand, a purposeful conversation between parents and a child is associated with the language scaffolding of the child. It is characterized by the sophisticated vocabularies, the use of complex sentences, critical questions for further clarification (such as W questions). The child can thus have more opportunities to explore his thought and feelings so that they are well delivered verbally. However, this does not always take place. Therefore, this research is deeply concerned about the child language acquisition throughout the implementation of conversation stations.

To promote and elevate the language to a child can be reached throughout a number of ways. Implementing the conversation stations is a part of them. The notion of conversation stations refers to the conditions set so that the child has more room to talk, to get feedback on his language, and to have appropriate language modeled for him (Bond&Wasik, 2009). Stations indicate the vibrant conversation engagement between a child and a fluent speaker such as the parent of the child, in which the latter

tend to use richer languages, instead of subject and verb only of the sentence. Normally, the fluent speaker initiates to introduce a certain topic including the animal the child likes most to introduce and contextualize a certain targeted vocabularies. In this context, the parent or caregiver triggers the child to express himself or herself. Simultaneously, the parent becomes his 'friend' in a way that they listen attentively to what the child is saying. In addition, the parents also develop the topic by asking open-ended questions or clarifying the child's previous statements or responses that could stimulate the activation of the appropriate use of the children vocabularies.

In a social context, the child can learn from his or her environment about the language that his or her interlocutor used. The child can listen, imitate, and repeat a great deal of vocabularies that the child heard. Parents, however, are claimed to be important resources in early childhood in particular for children's later language skills (Sundari, 2016). The supportive environment in a domestic realm for instance is undoubtedly required. It justifies the importance of the parents' role to children's Indonesian language proficiency.

Research on children language development is numerous. One of them is Bond and Wasik (2009). The researchers

particularly and directly addressed the conversation stations in their study. Their publication entitled *Conversation Stations: Promoting Language Development in Young Children* instigates me to do further research. The highlighted points is that it is believed that the given notion can promote language and vocabulary development in preschool classroom. Moreover, its implementation, accordingly, allows teachers to understand their students better. For example, the teachers are well informed that one of their students' hobby is dancing and singing, while the rest loves a blue color than red one. They, however, put the emphasis on the theoretical underpinning of the conversation stations rather than lied their case on occurring linguistic data basis. In other words, their study is theoretical. For example, the role of the conversation stations, the role of the teacher, creating the conversation stations, child-initiated conversation, teacher-initiated conversation is what they put in a priority in their papers.

The effectivity of the conversation station practice, however, remains questions. It can be exemplified by the fact that what measurable, regardless how many data we have in number, evidences of linguistic features supporting the argument are specifically under concerns. Among given questions, many researchers are interested in studying the issue under discussion by proposing quite creative approaches to help children grow healthy linguistically.

Subsequent research is mainly concerned about the importance of the language development of the children in association with other aspects of the children's life. Lee (2011) believes that the children's expressive vocabulary size and lexical composition at age 2 bring literary advantages up to fifth grade. Bleses, Makransky, Dale, Højen, and Ari (2016) see the significance of expressive vocabularies of the children with their educational achievement. Accordingly, the children reading ability in upcoming ten years is influenced by how rich their vocabularies when they were at 30 months. Kemp et al (2016) also assert that the infant's ability to use speech sound categories and early productive vocabularies are associated with their concurrent and later task language performance.

Whorral and Cabel (2016) addressed the strategies and examples for preschool teachers to support preschool children oral language skills. The researchers' interest on this issue is based on the phenomenon in which most of the preschool teachers were missing tremendous chances to engage children in a meaningful conversation or in cognitively challenging conversation (Massey, 2004, Whorral & Cabell, 2015, and Winton, P., & Buysse, V. 2005), either they are knowledgeable or unknowledgeable that promoting a meaningful conversation is linked to the development of the children linguistically. The researchers argue that the quality of language input is important for the development of oral language skills for preschool children.

Rather than proposing new approach in investigating the children language development, the current research aims to uncover two main issues: the linguistics features that are missing in the previous approach that the child performs and its impact to the development of the child' language. The first issue is based on the basic mental entities designed (the measurable linguistic features) and what the impact of the

implementation of the conversation stations that might carry on. Basic mental entities consist of objects, attribute and modifier, event, and evaluation of the events including the provision of the logic behind the argument. Basic mental entities are measurable linguistic phenomena implemented in this context to assist and assess the child's language acquisition. And it should be noted that they are not found in the previous research. It is therefore worthy to note that they are handy linguistic means to describe in which aspects the child develops linguistically. Supporting children's interests, using sophisticated vocabularies, and open-ended questions and cognitively challenging topics are examples and strategies offered to stimulate such purposeful conversation between the parent and his son, aged four years and two months old.

II. METHOD

The current research employed a descriptive qualitative design. It is relevant because the purpose of this research is to reveal the son's linguistic features as a consequence of the implementation of conversation stations descriptively. It seeks to understand how the implementation of the conversation stations is associated with the son's language acquisition. The source of the data was the child aged 4 years and two months. We engaged in the conversation stations to see how they are interwoven with language usage performed by the son. The data was collected three times, taking from five (5) to ten (10) minutes in each, and the son and his parent's utterances were noted. It took place during August 2019. Data selection and reduction were made for data analysis. To initiate the topic of the conversation, we had Mega doodle: Doodle and Discover a World of Fascinating Facts encyclopedia. However, the encyclopaedia does not limit the son to express himself. Other topics that the son interests can be an alternative theme to explore the idea of the exchange.

The data was subsequently analysed to look at the interplay between the speaking data and the underpinning theories. We looked at the linguistic performance based on the basic mental entities that are presumably shown by the son due to the application of the conversation stations. Basic mental entities refer to naming objects, attributes and modifier, event, and attribute, modifier, and evaluation of the event. We put the emphasis on the linguistic aspects indicated in basic mental entities including the logical reasoning given to the previous statement by the son.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the collected conversational data that the parent and his son shown. The analyzed data mainly focused on basic mental entities: naming objects, attributes and modifier, event, and evaluation of the event.

The conversation stations relate to the designed setting of the talk between the fluent speaker (parent) and his son. Not only that, but also the fluent speaker tends to give more room for his son to talk, allow the son to use more complex language, and trigger the son to talk more. Active participation of the adult while children acquire the language is crucial for their later development (Menn, 2017). What his parent did is that he was proposing critical questions such as why so that the child can give logical reasoning to the

questions. For coding, P is for Papa (Daddy) and A is for Anak (son) used in the data display. All data include useful information in pertaining to basic mental entities such as naming an object, modifying it, describing and or evaluating the event, and providing logical reasoning to the statement given. They also cover both directed-child and directed-parent talks.

One of the parent's role was to initiate a meaningful conversation by proposing the topic based on the picture available on the encyclopedia. After that, the parent listens attentively to what the son said for further clarification or topic development. Not only that, the parent employed rich language and a wide variety of vocabulary, including critical question such as why question to expect logical reasoning given by the son. However, it does not always work in that way: the son has the same opportunities to set up his topic and it is acceptable. What is expected when we appreciate the son's interest is to let the son speak his thought, feeling, and perceptions freely. The excerpt exemplifies the logical reasoning that the child gives in responding to the given question:

A: Ayo Pa beli AC

P: kenapa?

A: biar cepet boboknya. Nyenyak tidurnya.

The topic was initiated by the child which is about the air conditioner (AC). The topic was unavailable on the encyclopedia but the subject purely becomes the issue because the son introduced it (Ayo Pa beli AC). Even so, the parent does not confine it but positively responds the child's interest by proposing such critical question (kenapa). According to Cabell, Justice, McGinty, DeCoster, and Forston (2015), language acquisition can take place when the child's interest is responded and the interlocutor extends the conversation. It should be noted then that such critical question can trigger the son to address the question properly and even longer. The why question requires thought. Based on the answer (biar cepet boboknya. Nyenyak tidurnya./so that you sleep quickly and tight.), the question enables the son to provide not only a relevant answer but also a logical one. It indicates that such why question helps the child to develop his oral language skills.

The following extract also illustrates how the child shows a logical reasoning to why he should not make his parent to get out, which is hot out the house.

P: Ayo keluar..

A: Jangan keluar dulu, masih panas. Kalau uda ndk panas, boleh keluar.

The son responds to his father's invitation in the form of prohibition (jangan keluar dulu../do not go outside..). However, the son, at the same time, provides a supporting reason (masih panas/still hot) to why they should not go outside. From this point of view, the parent seems delighted so that no need to have further question why they should stay inside the house. Further clarification is also given by the son by saying kalau uda ndk panas, boleh keluar (we can go outside if it is not sunny anymore). It shows how

important it is to have logical reasoning behind the argument. This reasoning skills can be expanded when the children are in the condition of feeling comfort in expressing their ideas or opinion. It is also suggested by Smith and Dickinson (1994) who found that reasoning is visible in the talk when children are exposed to exploratory talk, that is a talk in a stimulated environment providing more room to children for self-elaboration. The reasoning skills of the children can also develop in the use of open-ended question when conversing with adults (Tay-Lim, 2011).

Another interesting point that we can highlight is that the son modifies the (unstated) subject which is it (it is still hot.) Panas (hot) is an adjective to describe the weather and it is used properly by the son. For that reason, we can claim that the son is able to describe the event that completely requires language skills, a wide variety of vocabularies for instance. The richness of the vocabularies that the child master indicates either the son's language develops or is undeveloped through his running age.

The data below also show how the child applies a line of reasoning to why his parent should or should not behave in a particular way.

A: Ini bantalnya buat papa (give his dad a red pillow). Papa pake bantal yang ini (the red one). Kalau pakai bantal ini, nanti tidurnya Papa nyenyak. Papa pake yang ini aja (the red one). Ini, Pa.

P: Ok, makasih.

From the extract above, we are delighted that the child gave his dad a pillow, the red one to be precise. Interestingly, the son kept talking by giving explanation and reasoning why his dad should have the red pillow, not others. The sentence used is complex, consisting of cause and effect (Kalau pakai bantal ini, nanti tidurnya Papa nyenyak/if you use this pillow, you will sleep tight.) It indicates that the son does not make the reasoning why his dad should have the red one untold.

What is interesting from the son's expression is that the parent can indeed interrupt the son while speaking, leading to the limitation of the son's expression. But his parent did listen attentively to what the son said. It means that giving more opportunities to the child to talk allows the child to use a wide variety of vocabularies that the son ever stored, assimilated. When the son thought that the chance is a right time to say a word he knew, he did. It shows us how giving more time to the son is important so that is useful for his later verbal expression.

The following extract also illustrates the logical reasoning that the child gives when the conversation takes place. The parent was asking why his son was unhappy with his personal naming (calling his son with the child's name).

P: Ayo Fawwaz naik.

A: Mas Fawwaz

P: Mas Fawwaz. Kenapa ndk mau dipanggil Fawwaz?

A: Sekarang aku udah besar. Ia kalau masih kecil.

It occurs when the son was called by the son's real name (Fawwaz), without a proper addressing (Mas is common naming and addressing for older son in cultural context) by his dad. Based on our conversation, being called Mas is his preference. For that reason, the son corrects social naming and addressing given his parent by adding Mas before his sure name. It becomes Mas Fawwaz from Fawwaz previously. The parent, consequently, clarifies to why he (the child) was unhappy with its naming and addressing (Kenapa ndk mau dipanggil Fawwaz?/why you are unhappy to be called Fawwaz?). The data shows that the child can provide a logical answer to the question (Sekarang aku uda besar. Ia kalau masih kecil./I have grown up already, not a baby anymore.) The question indeed triggers the child not to have a simple yes or no answer, but to have such creative thinking reflected through his language use.

Non only addressing the question properly, but also coding their own thought as a response to the speaker's utterance is a comprehension process that the child experience perceiving the utterance. Flavell, Green, and Flavell (2000) assert that children can understand the people acts based on their belief, regardless their belief is true or false. It means that when answering the question given, they actually try to read their own mind but link to the speaker's mind. Indeed, explaining their answer bridges the connection between what children are actually thinking and what comes to adults' mind.

The next data are another example of open-ended questions proposed by his dad. The context of the exchange is that the parent offered a question (Kenapa?/why?) when the child made a statement (Monyet itu suka pisang.).

A: Monyet itu suka pisang.

P: Kenapa?

A. Ndak tahu. Monyet suka pisang, ndk mau nasi. Maunya buah-buahan.

P: Tempatnya monyet di mana?

A: Rumahnya di atas. Rumahnya sendiri. Sepi. Ndak ada mamanya. Ndak ada papanya.

The question indeed stimulates the child to talk. When he responded to his parent, he is still able to elaborate the answer even though the answer is Ndak tahu/I don't know. Further explanation, however, given by the child (Monyet suka pisang, ndk mau nasi. Maunya buah-buahan./ Monkey likes bananas, but dislike rice. It likes fruits.) Open-ended questions lead to longer and more complex answers, including, for instance, explanation and reasoning (Lightbown & Spada, 2011). Therefore, open-ended question is associated with oral language skill (Whorrall & Cabell, 2016).

Lightbown and Spada (2011) also state that closed questions usually lead to simple one-word responses, no more space to elaboration. The following extract points out how simple questions limit expression. It can be proven by the following data of the parent's closed questions (Di mana sih rumahnya?/where is the house?, Monyet warnanya apa?/what is the color of the monkey?, Monyet mandi

ndak?/does (not) the monkey tak bath?). The answers to those questions (Jauh/far, Warnanya coklat/brown, Ndk/no) are relevant enough though. The point that can be highlighted, however, is that types of questions, either closed or open-questions, are also linked to motivation either the child tends to produce a rich language or simple one. In other words, the more room we give to the child, the more the child can express himself and respond even longer. In contrast, a very short answer to the question given by the son occurs because the question also limits the likelihood of an extended expression.

The following is another extract pertaining to responses that are basically influenced by the types of the questions proposed:

P: Di mana sih rumahnya?

A: Jauh.

P: Monyet warnanya apa?

A: Warnanya coklat.

P: Monyet mandi ndak?

A: Ndak. Aku mau jadi jerapah.

P: Kok jadi jerapah?

A: Nanti makan buah.

The data above is meant to compare and contrast to answers that are influenced by the types of the questions. The data clearly demonstrate that the child tends to speak short, provide a very brief comment because the question requires to do so. Opportunities that are available enable the son not to develop the topic.

The excerpt below also demonstrates how the child can provide detailed information of which the topic discussed when the parent gives more room to express himself.

A: aku ndk beli permen lagi. Aku beli yang sehat-sehat. Aku juga ndk beli mi. Kalau beli ndk sehat. Tapi kalau bikin sendiri, sehat.

In this context, the child elaborates the issue of a healthy life style. If we take the issue under discussion into account, it seems a serious topic and thus requires technical terms to have the idea well delivered. The child, however, is able to convey his thought pertaining to a healthy topic magnificently (in his age): what he wants and what he does not want, why he wants it and why he does not want it (aku ndk beli permen lagi. Aku beli yang sehat-sehat. Aku juga ndk beli mi. Kalau beli ndk sehat. Tapi kalau bikin sendiri, sehat./ I do not want to have candy. I want to have something health. And I do not want to have noodle. But if it is a homemade, is healthy).

Mushaitir (2016) believes that the variety of vocabularies that the child uses represents his/her cognitive abilities. The utterances above tell us how the child expresses a complex idea with a simple language. The notion refers to the healthy issue in which the issue is considered to be irrelevant to his age. However, meaningful conversation that the parent creates enables the child to use his web of knowledge about

a healthy issue. It is also worthy to notice that the son used cause-effect sentences, indicating such rich language.

Furthermore, the child is able to have a question and use attribute and modifier, as exemplified in the following excerpt:

A: Papa suka apa?
 P: Mangga.
 A: Mangga itu kecut.

The child initiated to ask a question (Papa suka apa? / what do you like, Papa?) Not only the parent who raises the question in the implementation of conversation stations in general, but also the child can have a question. This is one of the benefits to which the parent can give more room to the child to express himself. Therefore, the child has the same opportunities as the parent does to enhance oral language skills. Moreover, the child modifies the noun (mangga/mango) properly (kecut/sour). The use of adjective (kecut) is seen to be common and true to label the fruit (mangga).

In regard with the selected picture available on the encyclopedia, the following extract exemplifies the child naming the object and responding to the parent's question. Technically, the child named one of the animals, that is monkey (monyet). There are a number of the animals on the book and he pointed an object (and named it) that is relevant to its referent. One point that we can underline from the extract below is the child's response to his parent's question.

A: Ini monyet.
 P: Warnanya apa?
 A: Belum diwarnai

The answer to the question (Warnanya apa?/what is the color (of the monkey)?) is Belum diwarnai/not colored yet. Pragmatically, the answer is not what (the parent) expected. It can be perceived that the answer could be something that is blatantly related to any types of color: red, green, black, white, etc. The answer is brilliant since the response does not follow the rule (which is not associated with the color itself). The fluent speaker might also understand what the color it is as expected. For example, the son would normally say something like "red, gray, or black." But the son's response is totally different.

The answer seems tricky since it does not explicitly answer the question. According to Whorrall and Cabell (2016), the child builds the web of knowledge by offering familiar words in various context. In regards with the given answer (belum diwarnai/not colored yet), the chosen words are friendly; the son could understand already but it is used contextually. It indicates that the response does not only answer the question but also clarify the existing colour of the picture itself (that is white). Therefore, the practice can promote the son's oral language competence and the knowledge of the world.

The child response seems to show the child's pragmatic competence, understanding what answer is actually expected. According to Loukusa, Ryder, and Leinonen (2008), answering the question pragmatically indeed requires children's ability to utilize context that go beyond the information. Therefore, the child does not simply answer the question by showing a particular type of colors. The following data illustrates the son's interest of the topic. The son initiated the talk. He invited his dad (Pa, cerita-cerita hewan yuk? / let's have animal stories.). It is worthy to note that his dad shows his interest to respond by proposing such extended question.

A: Pa, cerita-cerita hewan yuk?
 P: Ayo. Cerita buaya.
 A: Iya. Ayo.
 P: Emang rumahnya buaya di mana?
 A: Di sungai. Sama kayak ular. Rumahnya di air. Masak sungai ndak ada airnya. Air itu lo Pa cair. Meleleh, kayak eskrim.

In the conversation stations, directed-parent talk is not always primary. The parent is not always in a position to direct the son to what to do (Gest, Holland-Coviello, Welsh, Eicher-Catt, & Gill (2006). Rather his dad who initiated the topic, the son directed his dad about what he is going to share with (about the animal (hewan), crocodile (buaya)).

Adult speaker usually develops more question to get more feedback from the child. This strategy is beneficial because it gets the child to respond verbally. A number of modification that adults make when talking to an infant can facilitate the child's language acquisition (DePaulo & Bonvillian, 1978). Therefore, generating related questions is a useful approach to make the child speak up.

Emang rumahnya buaya di mana? question motivates the son to answer the question more than a simple yes or no response because his dad used an open-ended question. Interestingly, the son provided a longer answer (that is what is expected in this practice) by describing the house of the snake (Di sungai (in the river)) in detail. In this context, the son is also able to give simile about the water (air itu lo Pa cair. Meleleh, kayak eskrim): the water is similar to ice cream: melting). In other words, the son can modify the nature of the water, that is liquid (cair). It is in line with Wasik and Jacobi-Vessels' notion (2017) that giving more opportunities to children to talk is an important element to develop child's language.

From the data we are well informed of the linguistic aspects that the son show. The son can name objects, give relevant attributes and modifiers, evaluate the event, and also provide logical reasonings to the statement. Basic mental entities are a useful device to look at the son's linguistic performance so that the major issues in the current research are measurable. Critical questions, open-ended questions that the parent proposed allow the son to use richer languages. Therefore, the implementation of the conversation stations is supportive to the child's language acquisition.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the conversation stations carries advantageous impacts on the language development of the son. The practice contributes to the meaningful talk in a way that the child can speak his mind since he has more room to do so. Parent's role was just to trigger him to talk by proposing familiar topics such as animals and then listen to him attentively. Interestingly, the talk is not only directed by the parent, but also initiated by the son. Indeed, the son proposed the topic of his own. He indeed set the topic based on his interest. Furthermore, the occasion also enables him to provide reasoning to support his statement logically. Presenting the evidences is handy for expression clarity so that the statement does not generate questions or minimize the potential gaps of information leading to the notion becomes vague or even unclear. By this way, the child can speak at any longer indicating that its implementation gives him tremendous chances to use language contextually.

The basic mental entities as language indicators designed are beneficial to look at the son's performance linguistically. They well informed us the linguistic aspects the son shows. The ability of naming the objects properly, and then modify them, and later giving evaluation of the event (by using more complex sentence, cause and effect for instance), is seen to indicate how the implementation of the conversation stations is closely linked to the son's oral language skills. In addition, the son was quite often to provide logical reasoning to the given statement and responded the why question sophisticatedly. It is argued that it even strengthened the logic behind the argument that the implementation of the conversation stations is associated with the child language development. Therefore, it is crucial to always assist and assess the child's performance in a measurable linguistic parameter.

Future research can put the following issues into consideration: having more participants involved and gender balance. The first idea may eliminate the overgeneralization since children, in the same age, may develop language in different ways so that enable us to potentially draw more accurate generalization. Putting gender balance into account is also worthy as this sheds light on how different sex may acquire distinctive language domain such as logic for male and intuitive language for female. When using adjectives for example, the future research can exemplify what sort of associative vocabularies that male and female frequently use in the conversation stations.

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