

## A CONVERSATIONAL ANALYSIS ENCOUNTERED BY ENGLISH YOUNG LEARNERS: A PEDAGOGICAL EXPERIENCE

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**Abstract:** This article is written to evaluate the conversational analysis encountered by English young learners. The subjects of this study were 4<sup>th</sup>-grade students in primary school. Since English serves as a lingua franca, there are a big number of parents who invite their children to learn English. Young learners are frequently involved in speaking discourses. Speaking discourses are quite related to a conversation. This article evaluated the conversational analysis, especially turn-taking encountered by young learners. The use of pictures and a video facilitate the implementation of the activities. The analysis was done by the teacher's observation during the activities. From the activities, it can be concluded that young learners encounter turn-taking when they are involved in a conversation.

**Keywords:** Young learners; conversational analysis; turn-taking.

### INTRODUCTION

English is an important skill that is needed by some people to be globalized civilians. Today, English is widely used in several aspects of humans' life namely education, technology, tourism, health, economics, and so on. It is common to see or hear some English discourses in our society. It means that English is somehow close to people's life.

Since there are big numbers of English text and discourse existing in our society, people start to realize that they need English to be globalized. To be globalized, people need to be updated about what happens now in the world. The existence of the internet allows people to keep being updated with some news and information from around the world. This awareness leads people to learn English. Therefore, many adults learn English for their own sake. Besides, some adults who are already parents inquire their children to learn English as young as possible.

Nowadays, it is normal to see children speak English very fluently. It happens because those children are accustomed to speak English. Some experts believe that English is best learnt when the learners are still young than old. Harmer (2007) believes that the reason why some parents inquire their children to learn English is that English serves as a *lingua franca* today meaning that English is a communication language used by two people speaking different languages.

Besides, Shin (2006) states that it would be advantageous for language learners to start studying English within a critical period - before 12 or 13 years old - so that they can enjoy the developmental benefits of that period. Many people are already familiar with the term 'critical period hypotheses. The hypothesis believes that "the younger the better" and children learn much more quickly and efficiently is generally appreciated by many, especially by the supporters (Brewster et al., 2004). Further, Brewster et al (2004) suggest the teachers contextualize the language by making use of visuals, realia, and mime and gestures.

Cameron (2001) claims that young children may learn a foreign language more effectively because their brains are still able to use the mechanisms that assisted first language acquisition. It is proved by research conducted by Katsuyama, Nishigaki and Wang in 2008. They found in their research on 1466 elementary school children in Japan that children who took English lessons in elementary school have more aptitude and interest in English than the children who do not receive English.

Therefore, Birdsong (2007) in Matsuoka (2008) believes that learners who start learning English early in life are more likely to attain a native or native-like accent than older starters. Likewise, Birdsong (2007) in Matsuoka (2008) argues that age should be regarded as an important factor that

influences the possibility of attaining native-like proficiency in a second language. Matsuoka and Smith (2008) believe that in foreign language teaching, age is one of the most critical individual differences. The ability of children in acquiring a second language is closely related to their language development.

Kelle (2001) states that the concept of development refers to physical, intellectual, psychological, or social getting on in life. It means that learning English functions as the life course as a passing of phases, a particular age, and a particular stage of development being linked ideal typically. Some of the new social constructionist approaches focusing on interaction, social life, and relationships reintegrate their results into the scientific discourse which is concerned with individual development.

However, a problem becomes the concern of the writer. It has been stated that learning English when the learners were young is better than learning English when the learners are adults. The writer of this article is eager to see how young learners encounter conversational analysis when they are involved in communication.

As conversational analysis functions to see social interaction among people, some studies under the issue of conversational analysis have been carried out. A study by Il Jannah (2014) investigated conversation in a movie that proves the turn-taking process occurred in that movie. Besides, a study conducted by Huda (2017) investigating the debate between Obama and Romney reveals that starting up, taking over, interruption, and overlapping is found in the conversational analysis. Also, Jufadri (2017) investigates the turn-taking process between David Beckham and the host of the 'Google' Talk Show. From Jufadri's result, it can be shown that the topics conveyed in the conversation will affect the turn-taking process.

Many studies have been done to investigate conversational analysis. However, those studies investigate adults and mostly did not investigate the conversational analysis under the instruction set. Therefore, it is essential to investigate a conversational analysis conveyed by young learners under the teaching instruction set.

### **The definitions of young learners**

Some experts have defined children as learners. The first definition is stated by Slatterly and Willis (2001). They classify young learners into two, namely children who are 7–12 years old and those who are under 7 years old. Meanwhile, Scott and

Ytreberg (2001) have different classification of age for young learners. They distinguish young learners into those who are between 5-7 years old and those who are between 8- 11. Yet, their ability to perceive the abstract and concrete should be taken into account. The Turkish primary curriculum for teaching English (Ministry of National Education [MoNE], 2006) defines young learners as the children from the first year of formal schooling (6 - 12 years of age).

### **The characteristics of young learners**

The way children learn is extremely different from adults. To deal with this, the teachers of young learners should treat them differently so the teaching and learning process will be meaningful and effective for young learners. To treat young learners as who they are in the English classroom, it is suggested for the teachers of young learners to know their students' characteristics, in this case, is young learners.

Many experts have provided the English education practitioners with lot of articles containing children's characteristics. Scott and Ytreberg (1995) have formulated the characteristics of eight to ten-year-old learners. Children at these ages are mature children with an adult side and a childish side. Their basic concepts are formed. They have very decided views of the world. At this age, they are already able to tell the difference between fact and fiction. They ask questions all the time that sometimes make adults around them confused to respond to their critical questions. Therefore, they tend to speak as well as make a physical movement to convey and understand the meaning. Scott and Ytreberg (1995) believe that children at this age are able to make some decisions about their own learning because they already have definite views about what they like and do not like doing. 8-10 years old children start to be able to work with others and learn from others. In their language development, Scott and Ytreberg (1995) argue that 8-10 years old children have developed their understanding of abstracts and symbols.

Siswanto (2017) characterizes young learners as enthusiastic and lively learners. They also have a lot of physical energy. Therefore, young learners can be easily stimulated. Learners in this age are at a maximum of openness to people and situations which are different from their own experience. For these children, a global emphasis is extremely important, which gives them an opportunity to work with information from all parts of the world. As they develop the cognitive characteristics of the

concrete level, they begin to understand cause and effect. Learners at these ages can work well in groups (Curtain & Dahlberg 2010). Rhalmi (2019) states that young learners get bored quickly, are meaning-oriented, like to discover things, prefer concrete activities, more egocentric and imaginative, and they imitate others.

Since children's cognitive processes develop further, the strategies used by the teachers of young learners will matter. Primary school learners use more complex vocabulary and grammar. Their ability to make mental representations are growing, but they still need guidance in grasping abstract concepts without the aid of real-life references and materials. (Tomlinson, 2014).

In addition, CDC (2014) states that children at this age show more independence from parents and family, while friendship, being liked and accepted by peers, becomes more important. Being in school most of the day means greater contact with a larger world, and children begin to develop a greater understanding of their place in that world. Children's ability to self-regulate their emotions also is evident in this period. They start to understand their own feelings and learn better ways to describe experiences and express thoughts and feelings. They better understand the consequences of their actions, and their focus on concern for others grows. They are very observant, are willing to play cooperatively and work in teams, and can resolve some conflicts without seeking adult intervention.

### **Teaching English for young learners through videos**

The characteristics of young learners have been portrayed in the previous section. As has been mentioned before, the teachers of young learners should treat young learners appropriately. Slatterly and Willis (2003) believe that young learners need to hear clear pronunciation and intonation to feel successful when using English plenty of opportunities to communicate to enjoy their efforts at speaking in English to know they have achieved something worthwhile. To do so, the English teachers should be role models in the classroom by performing English accurately, fluently, and appropriately.

Slatterly and Willis (2003) suggest the teachers of young learners by showing them what to do first, then, practicing an activity with the whole class. Having the learners in several groups can help the teachers to listen and talk to them. Moreover, children love stories. They are always eager to listen to stories know how stories work and they

always want to understand what is happening. Therefore, in writing the article, the writer used a video to teach the students.

It is in line with what Shin (2006) has stated. Shin (2006) states that one way to capture their attention and keep them engaged in activities is to supplement the activities with lots of brightly colored visuals, toys, puppets, or objects to match the ones used in the stories that you tell or songs that you sing. These can also help make the language input comprehensible and can be used for follow-up activities, such as re-telling stories. The use of video can help young learners to learn English in a fun way.

Shin (2006) mentions that stories represent holistic approaches to language teaching and learning that place a high premium on children's involvement with rich, authentic uses of the foreign language. Nowadays, stories include in both printed and digital form. In this digital era, children tend to read stories in form of digital or video. The teachers of young learners should take this as a chance to motivate the learners. Stories offer a whole imaginary world. The language used in stories is quite easy and enjoyable for children. The story makes dramatic irony so the readers know more about the central character. Besides, there is predictability built into the story that leads inevitably to the next. This predictability and sense of inevitability are broken by the surprise event. However, the teachers should consider the topic and the length of stories or videos. The topic and the length of stories or videos depending on the students' level and characteristics. After portraying the young learners' definition, characteristics, and way of learning, the discourse, and conversational analysis will be portrayed as well.

### **The definitions of discourse**

Pearson and Villiers (2005) define discourse as a structural unit larger than the sentence. Discourse minimally involves more than one sentence, and the sentences must be contingent. When children can both speak and elicit speech, they have the basic tools for creating discourse through conversation. Hickmann (2003) further argues that the basic unit of analysis in a language is discourse. It requires us to go beyond the sentence to include an intrinsic relation between utterances and their context of use.

While discourse competence concerns the mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres, the cohesion, and coherence of utterances or sentences. It is used to

refer to two related, but distinct abilities (Lasala, 2013). Discourse Competence can be seen as the ability to understand, create and develop forms of the language that are longer than sentences (stories, conversations, letters) with the appropriate cohesion, coherence, and rhetorical organization to combine ideas. Discourse analysis provides a new window on teaching and learning an oral language. It focuses on “the skills needed to put the knowledge into action and to achieve a successful communication.” (Cook, 1989). Cook’s (1989) definition of discourse analysis has been employed in how discourse analysis examines how stretches of language, considered in their full textual, social and psychological context, become meaningful and unified for their users. In other words, discourse analysis describes the interrelationships between language and its context (McCarthy, 2002) in Wu (2013).

### **Conversational analysis**

This writing is derived from the young learners’ activities in the English speaking class. Speaking is closely related to the conversation. The conversation reflects the rules and procedures that govern face-to-face encounters, as well as the constraints that derive from the use of spoken language. This is seen in the nature of turns, the role of topics, how speakers repair trouble spots, as well as the syntax and register of conversational discourse (Nordquist, 2017).

Therefore, McCarthy (2002) in Wu (2013) emphasizes that CA (Conversational Analysis) is important in fostering learners’ sociolinguistic competence, linguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. The examples of conversation cover greeting-greeting, congratulation-tanks. Meanwhile, according to Ghilzai and Baloch (2015), the turn-taking refers to the process by which people in conversation decide who will speak next. Wu (2013) believe that openings and closings are important in a conversation. They are the words people used to initiate or end a conversation. They vary in terms of different speech communities (Wu, 2013).

Garvey (1984) mentions that in emerging conversational skill in face-to-face interaction, people should include knowing when and how to take a turn in conversation; how to initiate, elaborate, or terminate a topic; and how to respond to a speaker in keeping with the pragmatic constraints set by the preceding utterance. They also include skills in detecting the presence and source of any breakdown in communication and knowing how to repair such breakdowns.

The first of these behaviors to show development is turn-taking. A second key to promoting conversation is learning to be relevant. The second speaker must make his or her responses to share the first speaker’s topic and add new information to it. Skill at conversational exchanges also involves being aware of when a turn is not successful. Efforts at repairing misunderstood turns are seen before age three (Garvey, 1984).

What is often called a conversation analysis within the American tradition can also be included under the general heading of discourse analysis. In conversational analysis, the emphasis is not upon building structural models but on the close observation of the behavior of participants in talk and on patterns that recur over a wide range of natural data (McCarthy, 1991). Sacks, Shcegloff, and Jefferson (1974) in McCarthy (1991) believes that it is important to study conversational norms, turn-taking, and other aspects of spoken interaction. Pour (2015) emphasizes that conversational analysis is worth paying attention to as it gives humans a chance to manage what they want to say, how long it takes, or how it affects others, therefore humans are able to live and make the relationship with others successfully.

### **Assessing speaking for young learners**

Cameron (2001) lists some principles in assessing children’s language learning. First, an assessment should be seen from a learning-centered perspective. The teachers should understand how classroom activities and talk will be experienced by children. The teachers should be sure that the children have a willingness to participate in social interaction and engage in classroom activities. Learning that occurs in social contexts and through interaction with helpful adults or other children will help the young learners to learn.

Secondly, an assessment should support learning and teaching. Assessment should contribute to the learning process, for both an individual child and for the class. In order to be more in control of the relationship between assessment and learning, teachers need to have a clear understanding of language learning processes and of the socio-cultural context in which they operate.

Next, assessment is more than testing. A skilled teacher continuously assessed pupils’ learning through what s/he notices and how s/he interprets these observations in the light of experience and knowledge. Finally, an assessment should be congruent with learning. Cameron (2001) defines ‘congruent’ as the assessment should fit

comfortably with children's learning experience. On the whole, it is fairer to assess children on the basis of what they have been taught and *how*, using assessment activities that are familiar to children from their classroom experience.

## METHOD

The study was aimed at evaluating the young learners' performance in a communicative activity. Students' conversational analysis was a skill that was analyzed. A qualitative approach was used to gather the data for this writing. The teacher was the instrument for this writing. The teacher did an observation during the implementation of the activity. An observation was used as data collecting technique in this study because the subjects of the study were students of 4<sup>th</sup>-grade primary school. As young learners are not ready yet to fill a questionnaire as the data collecting technique, an observation was regarded as an appropriate tool for gathering the data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The students have been taking an English course for 5 years meaning that they already have sufficient English proficiency for their level. They shared a quite similar level proficiency in English.

The procedure of the activity for this writing covered both pre- and communicative activities. In pre-communicative activities, the teacher made sure that all of the students had the same schemata about the video they were going to listen to. It was important to ease the students to be involved in the activities. The teacher used the video of food and all of the learners were already familiar with the topics.

In conducting all activities in this meeting, the teacher only chose one topic which was foods and beverages. To make sure that all students had the same schemata, at the beginning of the activities, the teacher showed them several pictures of fruits and asked whether they liked them or not. Then, the teacher told the students how to ask others' preferences by making use of a video. The teacher provided the students with some jumbled pictures derived from the video and asked the students to arrange it before watching the video. After the students arranged the pictures, the teacher played the video for them and asked the students what the video was about. At the end of the meeting, the teacher invited the students to involve in a short conversation by asking and responding about preference.

The teaching and learning process was done in one of the student's house, so the learning

environment was so comfortable for the students who were young learners. All the young learners were little girls so they talked much during the learning process. At the beginning of learning, the teacher showed them some colorful pictures of fruits. The teacher asked whether they like or do not like certain fruits. The students were excited because they were interested in looking at the colorful pictures.

The students were a little bit confused when the teacher gave them a jumbled picture. The teacher provided them with several scissors so the students could cut the jumbled pictures out then arrange them into the correct sequence based on their schemata and conversational skills. It has been stated in the previous section that when the students are involved in a certain conversation, they will activate their skills such as turn-taking. By looking at the jumbled pictures, the students were expected to arrange the pictures into the correct sequence by activating their 'turn-taking' skill. At the end of the meeting, the students were asked to choose some pictures of beverage and asked their friends' preferences. Besides responding by "Yes, I like" or "No, I don't", the students were asked to state their reasons as well.

After implementing the activity, the writer figured out that this kind of activity can be used for advanced learners by choosing more challenging topics. The activities can be adapted to any age and level. However, the topics should be challenging enough for any students so the students will be motivated. However, the teacher cannot force young learners to have the same discourse skills as adults. In this writing, the teacher only focused on conversational analysis. The teacher may require more skills for adults such as cohesion, coherence, speech acts, etc., depending on the students' competence.

## CONCLUSION

As English is regarded as an important skill for people to live in this global era, there is high demand by parents to invite their children to learn English as early as possible. Some studies have shown the benefits of learning English at a young age. However, young learners have different characteristics from adults, so the teachers of English young learners should treat them differently. Discourse already exists since childhood. This writing which concerns speaking takes conversational analysis as the discourse branch that has been analyzed. The analysis is derived from the activities done in the English classroom.

The conversation is taken for this activity. In a conversation, actually, the students activate their skill namely turn-taking. As a result of this activity, it is shown that the students are able to do turn-taking when they are involved in a conversation. This was done by the students by asking and responding to their friends' preferences about foods and beverages.

This writing can become a reference for other parties who are interested in teaching young learners and teaching discourse. However, this writing cannot escape from its limitation. Further research with larger subjects is needed to deepen the findings so the findings can be generalized.

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