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**PRAGMATICS ACQUISITION OF FIVE-YEARS OLD INDONESIAN  
CHILDREN IN CASUAL CONVERSATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research was aimed at finding out the pragmatics acquisition of five-years old Indonesian children in casual conversation. The objectives of this descriptive qualitative research were to: (1) find the type of the pragmatics acquired by a five-years-old child, (2) to find out the way of how do the five years old Indonesian children acquired the pragmatics in casual conversation, and (3) to find out the reason of why do the five years old Indonesian children acquired the pragmatics in this way. The data were obtained from three Indonesian boy children who lived in Batakness environment where most of their friends spoke in Batakness language. This study was located at lintongnihuta, Humbang Hasundutan reGENCY. In collecting the data. this study applied documentation with audio visual recorder as the instrument of collecting the data. The technique of data analysis used in this study was descriptive technique, and the data were described trough the process of transcribing the data and reducing the data by the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying and transforming the transcripts of the data, after that, displaying the data and at last drawing the conclusions. The finding indicates that the subject of this study had mastered pragmatics, were the types of pragmatics acquired are exchange structures, turn taking, repairs, and cohesion. While the most dominant pragmatics used was turn taking. The way of five years-old Indonesian children acquire the pragmatics in casual conversation were by united the environment's effect, culture, habits, mood, and their focus on their own mind, needs, and what they were thinking about. And the dominant affected by focusing to their mind only. Then based on the interview with their parents and other caregivers, it's found that the reason of using pragmatics in highest frequency were because the children often focused to the things in their mind only.

***Keywords: Pragmatics, Acquisition, Indonesian Children, Casual Conversation***

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Acquisition is ‘a subconscious and intuitive process of constructing the system of a language, not unlike the process used by a child to ‘pick up’ a language’ (Brown 2002: 278). Learning is a conscious process in which ‘learners attend to form, figure out rules, and are generally aware of their own processes. Language is the uniquely human characteristic. Men, women and children have their own languages. Children learn language at a stage when they themselves are developing rapidly. They may also master a second language easily. Generally, they acquire one language then they will master another language that is influenced by their environment in different ways.

According to Danny (1982), the process of mastering the language is related to the process of acquiring the language. The process of acquiring a language in a child is naturally a process of development. This process is usually called language acquisition. In the process of the development, there are some important things that they get. It involves language comprehension, language production, and language perception of the child in acquiring the language as a child is not born with the knowledge of a particular language. Language acquisition very similar to the process children use in acquiring first and second languages. It requires meaningful interactions in the target language-natural communication-in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding.

It has been hypothesized that there is a fairly stable order of acquisition of structures in language acquisition, that is, one can see clear similarities across acquirers as to which structures tend to be acquired early and which tend to be acquired late. Acquirers need not have a conscious awareness of the "rules" they possess, and may self correct only on the basis of a "feel" for grammaticality. De Boysson-bardies (1999:37) states that the adults influence the development of children’s language. The children carefully follow the movements of mother’s mouth and try to imitate them. They distinguish voice and showing a particular preference. They are sensitive to the rhythm and intonation of adults talk. Parents provide predictable repeated situations in which meaning of utterances is clear to the child. And they effectively teach their ideas over to the children. The children never make conversation with other people seriously, but they acquire the language and share the knowledge with other people.

Clark (2003:1) argues that babies are not born talking. They learn language immediately from birth. They hear sounds and words, meaning and constructions. They need to know what to use, where and when, how to integrate language with other modes of communication, how to make them understood and how to understand others. During the infants or very clearly childhood period, children learn to express things by using speech sounds. Whenever they feel hungry, thirsty or hurt, they produce speech sound such as crying, which is also a part of the process of communication, where the infants start to use their articulation to communicate with other people because they are still not able to say perfectly what they want like adults do.

In addition, Darjowidjojo (2000:49) explains that human beings are born to speak, with an innate gift for figuring out the rules of the language used in the environment. Environment influences the children in conversation. Infants need other people such as their caretakers, parents, friends and people who live around them to motivate them to communicate through crying, cooing, uttering sound or meaningful words which help them to be able to carry out conversations and to communicate their needs and wants with other people in the community. The adjustment in the caretakers speech register served two functions, namely to facilitate understanding and to get the child to be involved in the conversation.

Conversations may be learned in early interactions, such as taking turns and the way they express, as declared by Gleason's (2005). As a result, this life long process of development was dependent on social interaction and that social learning actually leads to cognitive development. Moreover, generally speaking, the children's social interaction is firstly occurred in the family. Thus at the beginning, children's language acquisition will take place with their parents. Parents will become children's first teachers.

Casual Conversation can be happen where the participants have equal power in the interaction both of polite and confirming. (Wagner, 2008). Polite is Interactions where little previous and/or future contact is likely and therefore affective feelings between the participants will not be well developed and confirming is Interactions where the participants are in close or continual contact and therefore have developed affective attitudes or feelings towards each other.

Several previous studies prove that children's acquisition of casual conversation in different ages have different Ability in communicating by casual conversation. For example, as investigated by McTear (1985), he has examined the pragmatics of children's conversations. The main pragmatic structures he notes are: greetings, initiations, attention getting, attention directing, and conversation repair e.g. repeating an utterance or requesting or responding to a need for clarification, and use of discourse connectors for topic shift or to continue the conversation after repair and to signal turn taking. Turn taking exchanges can be to initiate, respond, follow-up or conduct a simultaneous response with initiation (e.g. "is it in the cupboard" in response to "where is it?") Even young children use verbal and non-verbal means to accomplish these activities as well as changes in prosody and variation in politeness depending on the partner.

The other one is a study by Sutopo (2013) which focuses on language acquisition of kindergarten child, he has an assumption that the types of casual conversation acquired by childrens still in very limited concepts and just got in the purpose to express what the child wants. In this case the commodity exchanged could be either information or goods and services. The roles associated with the exchange relations are either giving or demanding. One of the requirements in the process of studying a child's language acquisition is to understand the child's family background. It is an important fact to be studied so that the development can be well understood and will give a great deal of contribution to the process of a child's mental development.

Child's language is a unique phenomenon because they acquire the language from the environment and sometimes what they say is not what they mean. The child's language is understandable when the child has developed. Every child has different cognitive development. It means even at the same ages they do not have the same abilities in communicating by casual conversation. The example of pragmatics acquisition in casual conversation used by children can be seen on the conversation between 2 boy of five-years-old Indonesian child in, the writer's own son and his friend. One day, suddenly the writer's own son approached his friend and asked.

(A) : "*Punya permen?*"

(B) : "*Punya, nah.*". (issued candy and gave it to A.)

Gramatically the question asked by A to B was just a curiosity whether B have candy or not. But pragmatically it means that A wish B gave him candy. Understanding contained in the speech in the pragmatics study called 'purpose', or the meaning. So, pragmatically the question from A to B is not contained the meaning, but the purpose. In the example above, B had known the purpose of A so that beside answering the question, he also give the candy.

Based on researcher observation in daily activity while interact and communicate with children, she found that most children use pragmatics utterance based on the context. Children understand one each other since they are in the same perception, same area and same context.

The process of acquiring a language is regarded as a very complex and interesting to be studied. The writer is very much interested in conducting a research on a Batak Toba child. The writer is very curious to observe the child's acquisition of language specifically the pragmatics acquisition of casual conversation.

In accordance with the explanation above, in this research the writer is interested in studying about pragmatics acquisition of casual conversation by children of five-year-old as a case study on the writer's village, Humbang Hasundutan, Sumatera Utara. Three children are decided in this research since this study is language acquisition and conducted as a case study, so it must be investigated personally and can be done on an individual. The writer feels interested in studying this problem by taking Mc Tears theory which main pragmatic structures he notes are: greetings, initiations, attention

getting, attention directing, and conversation repair. Further, the age of five chosen in this study because as we know that a-five year old children in this period are considered being active speakers with good speaking to communicate his mind. That's why the writer is interested in observing the children in this age.

This research would like to describe the types of pragmatics structures acquired by five years old Indonesian children in casual conversation, to find out the way of how do the five years old Indonesian children acquired the pragmatics in casual conversation and to find out the reasons of why do the five years old Indonesian children acquired the pragmatics in this way.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study is conducted by applying qualitative research design. This study employs a qualitative research design. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992:52), the design used in the research refers to the researcher's plan of how to proceed. So far, this study for more specifically uses observational case study as one kind of qualitative research design. Bogdan and Biklen (1992:68) say that it refers to the study done to a subject, a setting or a depository of data. In this study, the subjects of the research were 3 children, namely Thorysan Tambunan, Nicholas Nababan, and Joshua Nababan. They lived in Lintongnihuta, Dolok Sanggul. They were friends in the kindergarten of TK Katolik Santa Lucia Lintongnihuta, Dolok Sanggul. The researcher used them as subjects because her purpose was to investigate the language acquisition of five years old kindergarten students.

In the process of data collections, the researcher conducts the observations by using digital camera to take pictures while observation happen, schedule field notes to collect the data observation per day and audio taping to record the data interview. The digital camera will be revealed in the brief moments to paper during and after studying.

Data in qualitative study appear in words rather than in numbers (Miles and Huberman, 1984). The data of this study was the conversations between five years old Indonesian children in Lintongnihuta, Humbang Hasundutan. The data was taken from transcript of recorded observation and field notes. Transcript of observation was obtained through daily observation in different contexts namely context of playing, watching TV, relaxing, schooling and home activity which was done for three months.

In collecting the data, this study used naturalistic method by observing, recording, taking notes and interviewing. In doing data collection, the writer got involved with the subject's conversation everyday whether as an active participant or only as an observer. It is due to the fact that one of the subject of this research was the researcher's own son, while two others were her neighbour, and they live in the same village.

In this analysis, it was conducted by interactive method by Huberman, Miles and Saldana (2014). Huberman's and Male elaborated some steps of analyzing data, they were data condensation data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data deliberately, there are some findings found. The findings of the research are 1) It was found that the child has acquired the four types of pragmatics structures also the combination of them in casual conversation. They are exchange structures, turn taking, repairs, and cohesion.

a. Exchange Structures.

Conversation does not consist of a random sequence of utterances by two individuals: there should be a clear relationship between utterances in sequence.

b. Turn Taking.

Turn taking was coded in a second pass through the transcript. In contrast to the first pass, where every utterance was coded for exchange structure, turn taking codes were only noted against utterances where gaps or turn taking violations occurred.

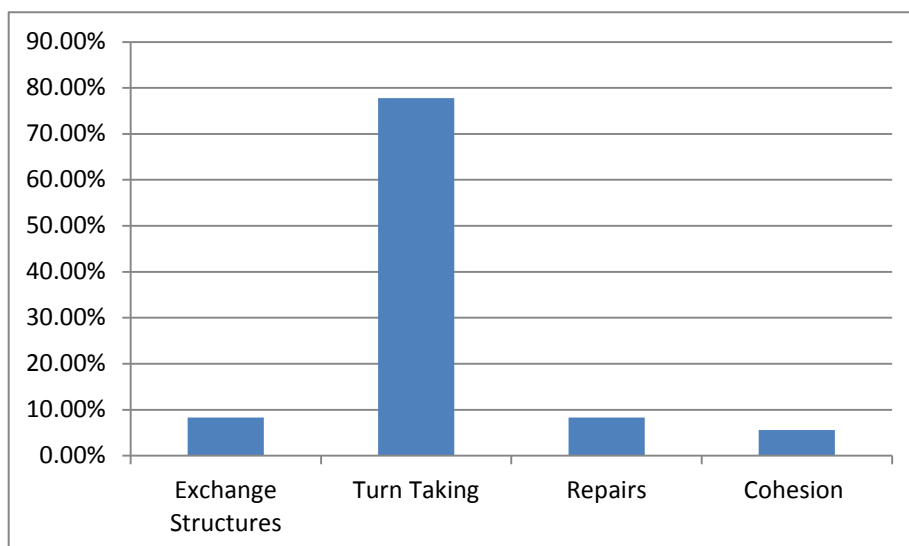
c. Repairs.

A request for clarification was identified where the adult appeared not to have understood part of the child's utterance, usually because of unintelligibility, but sometimes when an unusual word or idea was used and the adult required confirmation. A crucial feature of a request for clarification is that it represents a halt in the progress of the conversation while the speaker and listener confirm the preceding exchange.

d. Cohesion

A major means of achieving cohesion is to use pronouns and demonstratives which are not interpreted semantically in their own right, but Make reference to an element from another utterance for their interpretation.

To give clear description on how the pragmatics have been acquired by the children, the researcher gave the reinforcement by using graphic of the pragmatics usage by the children.



Graphic 4.1 Pragmatics usage by the five year old children (TT, JN, DT)

From the graphic displayed above, dealing with the types of pragmatics structures, it is seen that the highest frequency of pragmatics structures is turn taking and the lowest frequency is cohesion. This occurs due to the factor of linguistic acquisition as stated by McTear (1985) that the main pragmatic structures he notes are: exchange structure, turn taking, repairs and cohesion e.g. repeating an utterance or requesting or responding to a need for clarification, and use of discourse connectors for topic shift or to continue the conversation after repair and to signal turn taking. In this case, the subject's ability in producing certain words which need certain input from the environments influences his output in uttering particularized pragmatics structures. As we know, that particularized pragmatics a structure requires particular knowledge to use.

In addition, contexts become the most important one for the hearers in getting the speaker's pragmatics structures in his utterances. Dealing with generalized pragmatics structures, the specific contexts and particular knowledge are not required to see the intention. Therefore, it becomes the highest frequency in the subject's acquisition of pragmatics structures. While, the combination of the four types is also the least dominant type of pragmatics structures occurred in the child's utterances. It's because of the situation where only the child and the interlocutor who understand the terms used in the conversation and the requirements deal with the topic discussed. In this case, the combination uttered is the combination of the four pragmatics structures and the context is playing.

In the taking turn in a conversation, the speaker should know when and what to contribute to the conversation. For instance, he must know how to interrupt the other speaker. The interruption can be a moment for contributing a new idea or a new piece of information to the others speakers. The skill to do that must be trained because taking turn is a skill to make the topic focused. Since a conversation is an exchange of information, the speaker who has the skill must know what

information to offer. There should be relevance between what has been discussed and what is going to be expressed in the next cycle of conversation.

The way of five years-old Indonesian children acquire the pragmatics in casual conversation were by united the environment's effect, culture, habits, mood, and their focus on their own Mand, needs, and what they were thinking about.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

After analyzing the data, there are several points considered as the important ones to be discussed. These points are viewed to be different from the theory applied and from the previous researches.

### **1. Pragmatics Acquisition by five years old**

Children have acquired four types of pragmatics structures also the combination of them in casual conversation. They are exchange structures, turn taking, repairs, and cohesion. McTear (1985) has examined the pragmatics of children's conversations. The main pragmatic structures he notes are: exchange structure, turn taking, repairs and cohesion e.g. repeating an utterance or requesting or responding to a need for clarification, and use of discourse connectors for topic shift or to continue the conversation after repair and to signal turn taking.

Turn taking exchanges can be to initiate, respond, follow-up or conduct a simultaneous response with initiation (e.g. "is it in the cupboard" in response to "where is it?" Even young children use verbal and non-verbal means to accomplish these activities as well as changes in prosody and variation in politeness depending on the partner.

Barbara Zurer Pearson (2013) has examined the pragmatics acquired by two years old children. She found a developing speech acts or the communicative function of sentences in te children conversation. For example, using utterances to report events, to make statements or declarations about the world, to request information or action, or to prohibit action. Based o her study, emerging conversational skill in face to face verbal interaction include knowing when and how to take a turn in conversation, how to initiate, elaborate, or terminate a topic; and how to to respond to a speaker in keeping with the pragmatic constraints set by the preceding utterance (e.g., direct question forms demand answers; ndirect questions "ca you pass the salt?" demand actions). They also include skills in detecting the presence and source of any breakdown in communication and knowing how to repair such breakdowns.

Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig (2012) states that the study of pragmatics is traditionally held to encompass at least five main areas: deixis, conversational implicature, presupposition, speech acts, conversational structure. Within second language studies, work in pragmatics is narrower than it is in the field of pragmatics at large, including the investigation of speech acts and to a lesser extent conversational structure and conversational implicature. In his study, he focuses on adjusting one's language to fit the social context of the conversation keeping with cultural conventions and social



roles. These involves issues of politeness, formality, and the age or status of one's listener in what have been called "styles" or "registers" of speech.

Tim Wharton (2014) in his study considers the extent to which lexical acquisition is an exercise of an associationist ability, a general mind-reading ability or a specifically pragmatic ability. Particular attention is paid to the role played in word- learning by natural communicative phenomena- gaze direction, facial expression, tone of voice etc.- and to the question of how such behaviours might be accommodated within a pragmatic theory. Just as natural cues play a central role in lexical acquisition, so they also play a role in lexical pragmatics, the adjustment of encoded conceptual content. Indeed, the same cues that children use in the acquisition of words play a regular role in adult comprehension. For examples,

(1) Jack: Shall we sit out here?

Lily (shivering ostensively): I'm *cold*.

(2) Lily (furiously): That makes me *angry*!

(3) Lily (smiling broadly): I feel *happy*.

Yuniarti (2010) has examined children that was devided into three group according to their age, while her research based on the theory of children pragmatic development. The result of the research shows that in comprehending the DSA (Direct Speech Acts), the preschool children use two basic forms: agrreing and disagreeing the DSA or refusing. The result of the study shows that in agreeing the DSA, the preschool children may produce utterance (give verbal response) or do not produse utterance (nonverbal responses). Thus, in refusing the DSA, the preschool children may give verbal responses or nonverbal responses. The development of children comprehension on DSA shows that there are some strategies to minimize the threat toward negative face by using indirect refused statement; those are giving alternatives.

Clark (2014) in her research has highlighted several areas where pragmatics plays a central role in the process of acquiring a first language. In talking with their children, adults display their uses of language in each context, and offer extensive feedback on form, meaning, and usage, within their conversational exchanges. These interaction depend critically on joint attention, physical co-presence, ad conversational co-presence-essential factors that help children assign meanings, establish reference, and add to common ground. For young children, getting their meaning across also depend on realizing language is conventional, that words contrast in meaning, and that they need to observe Grice's cooperative principle in conversation. Adults make use of the same pragmatics principles as they solicit repairs to what children say, and thereby offer feedback on both what the language is and how to use it.

When one speaker begins to talk, the other must wait first some time. There is no definite length of time but the other usually knows when to contribute his ideas. In the conversation, the speaker will take a lead to start the talk. For instance, the speaker can discuss the topic. The addressee will of course tell everything he knows about the topic. He expects that his contribution is being informative or he assumes that the speaker doesn't know everything about the topic. The topic will continue in the form of information exchange. They can maintain the topic to the extent that they feel satisfied with the information they have exchanged.

For effective communication, turn taking should be equal distributed to both speakers because the conversation is basically an exchange of information. If one speaker takes too much time to explain what he is saying, the other one may feel bored or unable to interrupt. Again the attitude of the speaker must be friendly in the sense that he must respect the other speaker by giving him a chance to contribute something to the talk. Although one speaker is cleverer or more informative the turn taking must be clearly accepted as a way of balancing the talk or exchange the information. Thus, turn taking can cause a problem when one speaker doesn't give an equal opportunity to another to express himself. In the taking turn in a conversation, the speaker should know when and what to contribute to the conversation. For instance, he must know how to interrupt the other speaker. The interruption can be a moment for contributing a new idea or a new piece of information to the others speakers.

## 2. The way of five-years old Indonesian children acquired pragmatics in casual conversation

There were some ways on how the five year-old children acquired pragmatics in casual conversation, namely from:

### 2.1 Environment

The first factor which influences the acquisition of a language by children is environment where the children live. Environment here refers to the family and neighbourhood. Family environment include their families members such as mother, father, sister, brother, grandparents, aunt, uncle, cousin, etc. while neighborhood environment include the people who live near the children.

### 2.2 Culture and Habits

Culture and habits also took a big part in the pragmatics acquisition by five-year old Indonesian children. Each of the families has had its own habits and cultural traits. The peculiarity of each family shaped the what the language was spoken and understood amongst them. Same language with different culture and habits had a lot of different in conveying their mind.

### 2.3 Mood

The five-years old Indonesian Children in acquiring Pragmatics in casual conversation were affected by mood. Mood is generalized, internal state of feeling. It is closely related to the concepts of affect and emotion. In this research, for instance, when the children were mad (emotion), they are usually mad at specific things. And when they had a good mood, then they would spoke clearly, tend to gave the answer needed. While when the children was in a bad mood, they often spoke unclearly and often gave an answer which was not needed.

#### 2.4 Focus on own mind and needs

Children need to communicate their own mind and thinking. Each time they got any ideas, so on they would like to deliver it. They focused to the object on their mind only, without listen first carefully to the question.

The most dominant way they acquired the pragmatics is the last way, namely focusing on their mind and needs.

#### 3. The reason of the five-years old Indonesian children acquired pragmatics in they way it is.

Based on the result of interviewing parents, it was found that the reason of acquiring pragmatics in that way, are

##### 1.1. Affected by the environment, culture and habits.

Children live in environment where their parents live. Their parents speak according the their habits, and of course they would speak to their child in the same way. Environment affects the habits in a family. Children tend to imitate what they often listen from their parent and other caregiver.

##### 1.2. Depend on the mood and needs.

Another reason of using pragmatics in five-years-old Indonesian children is the change of the mood. Each time they got any ideas, so on they would like to deliver it. They focused to the object on their mind only, without listen first carefully to the question. And it's often they guess what another want to say by saying a sentence. Sometimes children also have a skeptic attitude so they interpret others word according to their mind and needs.

## CONCLUSION

At the last part of this thesis, the researcher presented some conclusions and suggestions related to the findings of the research. Based on the observations, the researcher could conclude that

- 1) There are four pragmatics structures acquired by five years old children in casual conversation namely exchange structure, turn taking, repairs and cohesion. While based on the data, it can be seen that the lowest frequency of casual conversation occurrence is in the context of playing and the highest is in the context of relaxing. In this case, the setting is where the child acquires casual conversation. In the context of playing, the child utters more rarely than the surrounding people. While, in the context of relaxing, the subject has absolute freedom to express his mind depends on the situation, that's why the subject has the most frequency in uttering sentences includes sentences belong to casual conversation.
- 2) The dominant type of pragmatic structures acquired by five years old children in casual conversation is turn taking. From the matrix displayed, dealing with the types of pragmatics structures, it is seen that the highest frequency of pragmatics structures is turn taking and the lowest frequency is cohesion. In this case, the subject's ability in producing certain words which need certain input from the environments influences his output in uttering particularized pragmatics structures. As we know, that particularized pragmatics structures require particular knowledge to use.

In addition, contexts become the most important one for the hearers in getting the speaker's pragmatics structures in his utterances. Dealing with generalized pragmatics structures, the specific contexts and particular knowledge are not required to see the intention. Therefore, it becomes the highest frequency in the subject's acquisition of pragmatics structures. While, the combination of the four types is also the least dominant type of pragmatics structures occurred in the child's utterances. It's because of the situation where only the child and the interlocutor who understand the terms used in the conversation and the requirements deal with the topic discussed. In this case, the combination uttered is the combination of the four pragmatics structures and the context is playing. 3) The way of five years-old Indonesian children acquire the pragmatics in casual conversation were by united the environment's effect, culture, habits, mood, and their focus on their own mind, needs, and what they were thinking about. 4) The reason of the five-years old Indonesian children acquired pragmatics in they way it is.

Based on the result of interviewing parents, it was found that the reason of acquiring pragmatics in that way, are affected by the environment, culture and habits, and depend on the mood and needs.

This study has also some suggestions to the readers with may be different positions. To the other researchers, it is suggested to conduct the same topic with more subjects with different ages to see the difference between them so the acquisition of those subjects can be seen more accurately and clearly. To parents or caregivers, it is suggested to use and trigger casual conversation to children since this pragmatics acquisition is the most meaningful study in language. And the last, to teachers, school interaction can be a good environment in helping children to increase their competences in communication.

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