



SPOKEN LANGUAGE FEATURES GENERATED BY PLAY-BASED INSTRUCTIONS

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Abstrak

Studi ini membahas tentang fitur Bahasa Inggris lisan yang digunakan oleh guru dan siswa melalui instruksi berbasis bermain, dan mengkaji tentang frekuensi penggunaannya. Peserta studi meliputi lima guru Bahasa Inggris dan sebelas anak TK di sebuah sekolah imersi. Bahasa lisan guru dan siswa diperiksa melalui rekaman audio dan video untuk menangkap data yang terjadi secara alami. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para peserta menggunakan lima fitur; bundel leksikal, frasa yang mengandung idiom, kombinasi bebas antara kata kerja dan partikel, frasa binomial, dan ekspresi formula lainnya. Ucapan-ucapan yang dihasilkan guru adalah eksposur bagi siswa untuk belajar Bahasa Inggris, dimana siswa dapat belajar dengan cara meniru dan memodifikasi apa yang mereka pelajari sesuai dengan kreativitas mereka dalam memproduksi ujaran. Para peserta juga menunjukkan produktifitas yang lebih besar pada bundel leksikal dan ekspresi formula lainnya, menunjukkan bahwa fitur yang paling sering digunakan mungkin adalah fitur yang paling mudah diperoleh melalui pembelajaran berbasis bermain.

Abstract

This study examines spoken English features used by teachers and students through play-based instructions; it examines frequency of occurrence displayed by teachers and students. The participants were five nonnative teachers of English and eleven kindergarteners in an immersion school. The teachers and students' spoken language was examined through audio and video recordings to capture naturally occurring data. Results show that the participants use five features; lexical bundles, idiomatic phrases, free combinations of verb + particle, coordinated binomial phrases, and other formulaic expressions. The utterances produced by teachers are exposures for the students to learn English, which the students could learn by imitating and modifying what they are exposed to based on their creativity in producing spoken language utterances. The participants also show greater productivity on lexical bundles and other formulaic expressions, indicating that the most frequent features, which occur, may be the most easily acquired features through play-based learning.

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INTRODUCTION

The notion of early childhood education to carrying out immersion program where English is used as a medium of instruction in an EFL (English as a foreign language) context, has been received worldwide attention towards children's language development that is more meaningful (Freeman & Freeman, 2004; Johnson & Swain, 1997; Resnick, 2006). This is supported by the idea of "Critical Period Hypothesis" proposed by Lenneberg in 1967 (as cited in Pinter, 2006) that the period of early years is considered as the critical period where children will acquire language to native level as they are exposed to the language-speaking environment. This idea suggests that although age is influential to second language acquisition, the environment where the target language is frequently used should also be there.

In the purpose of helping children towards their second language acquisition, teachers need to give tasks, which stimulate them to cooperate and help each other (Read, 1998). Moreover, children need supported and meaningful activities where there is lots of exposure to language use (Read, 1998). Therefore, play-based learning has been applied recently in kindergarten curriculum based on Vygotsky's theory of learning, emphasizing on the role of social interaction to acquire language (Johnson, 2004). It is suggested that language is effectively acquired through the engagement in social interaction where "language is as a vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social transactions between individuals" (Richard & Rodgers, 2001: 21). Here, language is directly used to establish communication when the situation demands.

Earlier studies have been conducted to investigate how play contributes to children's development. Some studies show that play could provide a chance for children towards not only their social development (Broadhead, 2006; Frost, 1992; Walsh et al., 2010), but also their language development (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Frost, 1992; Gupta, 2009). In addition, it is also suggested that the engagement of play allows children to explore their imagination (Vygotsky, 1978) and creativity that supports their language learning process (Kim & Kellog, 2006).

Griva and Sivropoulou (2009) pointed out that when children are engaged in play, they tend to have opportunities to communicate using simple phrases in meaningful interaction. The production of these phrases in this context is mostly as a whole chunk that characterize natu-

ral spoken English based on the teachers' input received (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2006) rather than putting sentences together word by word. For instance, when a teacher asks her student and then the student responds it by saying, "I don't want to do it" (refusal) and "I can't do it" (incapability), the production of these phrases is as a whole unit since "language acquisition is the process of learning these simple chunks and their associated functions in context" (Taguchi, 2007: 433). Here, teachers play an important role to develop their students' natural spoken language since they are in charge in delivering instructions.

However, few studies have been conducted on teachers and even young learners' spoken language features. Most of the studies mainly focused on adult learners (Biber et al., 1999; Nekrasova, 2009). The present study tries to focus on both teachers and young learners. In the context of the present study, the teachers are nonnative speakers of English who have no cultural experiences of living in English-speaking countries. However, nonnative language teachers have an adequate language proficiency to perform in academic settings (Llurda, 2004). Moreover, play-based learning is the center of kindergarten curriculum. Since it is the spoken language that has developed in this context, it is interesting to examine whether the teachers and students use spoken language containing spoken English language features through play-based instructions. Therefore, the research questions are addressed below: (1) What spoken language features are used by teachers through play-based instructions? (2) What spoken language features are used by students as a result of play-based instructions? (3) What is the frequency of occurrence in spoken language features displayed by teachers and students?

This study was conducted using a case study approach to capture naturally occurring data in a natural classroom setting. The participants were five nonnative teachers of English and eleven young language learners at Mondial School, an immersion school in Indonesia. Most of the students are native Indonesians and Chinese-Indonesian who speak Indonesian as their first language and many of them speak Javanese (local language). They ranged from five to six years old.

These eleven children belonged to the same class with different teachers each day depending on the skills developed; dramatic play center, language and math center, constructive play center, and science and exploration. Since play is at the core of the kindergarten curriculum, the students were engaged in play-based activities in every session. The participants met two and a half hours

each day. Moreover, the students were only engaged in one center of learning each day.

The data collected were the naturally occurring data in the form of verbal interactions; teacher-students interaction and student-student interaction. Audio and video recordings were carried out at capturing the spoken language produced. In addition, observation was done by providing observation sheets to take notes of whatever was going on in the classroom such as kinds of activities used during the teaching and learning process. Moreover, interviewing teachers were also done to gather information related to students' background that might influence the production of spoken language features.

After getting data from audio and video recordings, observation, and interview, the data were analyzed. Transcribed speech data were coded and then classified based on each feature of spoken language; *lexical bundles, idiomatic phrases, free combinations of verb and particle, coordinated binomial phrases, question tags, and other formulaic expressions.*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data analysis, Table 1 displays teachers and students' production of spoken lan-

guage features that are categorized feature by feature, involving lexical bundles, idiomatic phrases, free combinations of verb + particle, coordinated binomial phrases, question tags, and other formulaic expressions.

Lexical bundles

From Table 1, it shows that the teachers and students mostly use *lexical bundles* such as "I want you to ..." (personal pronoun + lexical verb phrase), "Do you know what ..." (Yes-no question fragments). The numbers indicate that lexical bundles ranked the first most frequently feature in teachers' production, followed by *other formulaic expressions*. However, the students tend to use *formulaic expressions* including apologizing, showing gratitude, and greeting the most compared to *lexical bundles*.

The high frequency of lexical bundles and other formulaic expressions produced more than 75% of utterances reveal that the students tend to communicate using chunks, of which they mostly hear from the teachers; one possible cause could be sufficient amount of practice in the school. This finding lends support to a claim (Cameron, 2001) that in an immersion context, the production of some phrases as a whole chunk is triggered by the input they receive.

Table 1. Frequency of Teachers and Students' Occurrence

	Occurrence of teachers' production	Occurrence of students' production
Lexical bundles	515	199
Personal pronoun + LVP	63	46
Pronoun/NP + be +	29	36
VP with active verb	31	32
Yes-no question fragments	185	17
Wh-question fragments	151	28
Lexical bundles with wh-clauses	2	2
Lexical bundles with to-clauses	20	14
V + that-clause fragments	1	5
Adverbial clause fragments	8	2
Noun phrase expressions	4	2
Prepositional phrase expressions	10	2
Quantifier expressions	0	0
Other expressions	0	8
Meaningless sound bundles	11	5
Idiomatic phrases	1	2
Idiomatic phrases across registers	0	0
V + NP combinations with have, make, and take	1	2
Free combinations of verb + particle	49	8
Coordinated binomial phrases	8	4
Noun and/or noun	2	4
Adjective and/or adjective	6	0
Question tags	0	0
Other formulaic expressions	381	218

Notes: LVP = lexical verb phrase. NP = noun phrase. VP = verb phrase.

V = verb.

The findings and the claim show that immersion program could provide valuable opportunities for the teachers and students to use the language naturally in spoken interactions. As proved in the previous study (Resnick, 2006), immersion promotes children to interact with the teachers and other students as much as possible to gain adequate language exposure. It shows that children in early ages are able to use the language frequently since English in this context, is used as a vehicle of communication.

On average, the children in the present study are around five to six years old although there are few children nearly reaching five years old. In addition, the length they are engaged in this immersion school ranges from three weeks to two and a half years. Although they are at very early ages, they are able to produce spoken English language features usually used by native speakers of English. Possibly, this is so because they manage to have sufficient exposure of language use, which leads them to develop their spoken language. They need a language to communicate with their peers when they complete the tasks given that have to do with the production of spoken language. This corresponds to a claim (Read, 1998) that children need supported and meaningful activities where there is lots of exposure to language and language is used to conduct activities. Language is used effectively to accompany their actions when they interact each other. During this period, spoken language features are naturally and gradually developed which are considered sufficient to facilitate their learning activities.

Lexical bundles containing *wh-question fragments* used (Example 1) when the students are engaged in the role-play, shows that there is a transactional conversation between the waiter and the customers about beverages in a restaurant setting.

Example 1

Kevin : May I try?
 Gina : Oh no! **Who want** juice strawberry or apple?
 Haga : Me.
 Gina : Oh no! **Where is** the apple?
 Who want juice strawberry? **Who want**
 juice strawberry?
 Betty : Me.
 Gina : Come here. Oh, sit sit sit! Oh, not sit
 here, sit over there!

The conversation shows that role-play based on the story helps the student to have sufficient amount of language use in a real situation to interact with their friends. As suggested in the

previous literature (Taeschner, as cited in Edelenbos et al., 2006), teaching young learners using a structured story allows them to produce the target language spontaneously. Being engaged in a role-play and a story gives students opportunity to develop the language more naturally in a specified setting. This lends a support to a claim that play could give a chance for children towards their language development (Bodrova & Leong, 2005; Frost, 1992; Gupta, 2009).

Apart from that, the teachers are able to produce *lexical bundle with "to-clauses"* containing phrasal verb "want to". On the third day, when Miss Raisa, a teacher in the constructive play center, wants to check a student's work by saying "Gina, I want to see your robot". Another example can be found when Miss Yelly, a teacher in the role-play center, wants to tell the students a story for the role-play they need to do by saying, "I want to tell you ...".

The dominance of the phrasal verb "want to" seems similar to the students' production. Most of the bundles are produced on the second day when Farhan and Rama try to make a horse and a racket from some colorful bars such as "I want to make it short" and "You want to change the color". It is likely that the learners show greater productivity in producing *lexical bundle with to-clause* using the phrasal verb "want to" to express preference because this is what they usually heard from their teachers. Moreover, they are similar because the students have learned from the teachers who give them the utterances as the model.

On the other hand, the differences of utterances are the result of students' creativity in producing their own utterances inspired by the utterances produced by the teachers. It can be concluded that the bundles used by the students are based on the teachers' input received. As demonstrated in the previous literature (Pinter, 2006) that children use chunks as a result of learning from the teachers' input. Based on the teachers' input received, the students could imitate the utterances from what they hear from the teachers and modify the utterances based on their creativity.

Moreover, the use of *verb-that clause fragments* could be seen in the following conversation between Gina and Farhan when they are working together to make a living room from the blocks. Based on the conversation, Farhan tends to use the bundles with the main verb "think". The use of the bundles containing the main verb "think" is mainly for the purpose of giving his opinion to discuss with Gina on how the living room should be.

Example 2

Gina : *What is this? In here.*
 Farhan : *Yes right. I think we no need this.*
 Gina : *Waaa.*
 Farhan : *I think just we get back.*
 Gina : *Like this.*

The bundles with the verb “think” in this context are usually used to negotiate for the task with partners. In other words, the bundles are commonly used to express agreement and disagreement with one’s opinion.

The cooperation between Farhan and Gina when they are playing blocks shows that play-based learning provides a chance for the students to cooperate with their peers in completing a task. Play leads the students to promote their interpersonal relation due to adequate amount of interaction. It lends a support to the previous studies on play-based learning (Broadhead, 2006; Frost, 1992; Walsh et al., 2010) that engaging the students in play could enhance their social development.

Idiomatic phrases

Table 1 indicates that this category is only used once by the teachers and two times by the students. The three time-occurrences of these phrases in either teachers or students are all a combination with the verb “take” which is daily used. The following conversation shows the production of idiomatic expressions.

Example 3

Miss Raisa: *What’s your mouth used for? (Pointing her own mouth)*
 Students : *Talk.*
 Miss Raisa: *To talk?*
 Students : *And eat.*
 Miss Raisa: *Yes, to eat. What else?*
 Students : *To drink.*
 Haga : *To take a bath.*
 Miss Raisa: *Oh... do you use your mouth to take a bath?*
 Students : *No.*

The conversation shows that the idiomatic expression combined with the verb “take” is a three-word phrases dealing with daily life. The phrases “take a bath” as first produced by Haga show what he usually does every day realizing that this expression is commonly used for daily life.

Apart from that, when Miss Raisa wants to ask about “mouth”, she tries to point her own mouth to help children attain the meaning of

the word. This is the way the teacher makes L2 easier to understand for the learners by providing a concrete object and gesture. This lends a support to the previous studies (Curtain, as cited in Nikolov & Curtain, 2000; Hoorn et al., 2010) that scaffolding such as gestures and realia could be used to support children’s understanding. In this case, children need a concrete experience in order for them to make meanings of L2 compared to adults.

Free combinations of verb and particle

Most of the teachers frequently use these phrases when they teach young children due to the need to have simple instructions for the children to do. The phrases that are mostly used are move back, put NP on, and start with. These combinations occur for various purposes. For example, the combination between “move” and “back” is usually used to manage the students’ formation of sitting. Example 4 shows the use of free combination of verb and particle when the teacher manages the classroom.

Based on the conversation, Miss Ratih uses free combinations “move back” very often in order to organize her students in sitting before conducting main activities. Then, the students respond to the instruction by directly taking action without responding it verbally since the instruction itself requires an action they need to do. Another free combination,

Example 4

Miss Ratih : **Put your hands up** and down, up and down.
 Can you cross your legs please, Kevin?
 Kevin : *Yes.*
 Miss Ratih : *Thank you. Gina, can you move here please?*
 And then Betty, **move back** please.
Move back, please. Gina, move here please.
 Farhan, **move back** please!

which has a pattern of “put + noun phrase + up” (put your hands up) shows that the teacher is trying to ensure that the students are ready to follow the teaching and learning process. In order to have their readiness, she encourages them to move part of body. It can be concluded that most of the free combinations are in the form of commands, which consist of two, or three-word phrases.

Coordinated binomial phrases

Coordinated binomial phrase is another feature in the spoken language, which occurs less

frequently. This feature consists of two words from the same part of speech such as “black” (adjective) and “white” (adjective). In line with its production, the teachers use the phrases in the form of noun and/or noun two times, and adjective and/or adjective six times within all meetings. The use of coordinated binomial phrases of adjectives could be seen in Example 5.

The production of coordinated binomial phrases in the conversation is mostly aimed at giving a choice among two options provided. In this case, the students are asked to identify whether their friends come from the same or different sexuality or gender that is divided by two; male and female. Moreover, the students need to answer only one, either

Example 5

Miss Raisa: Ok. I have Gina and Rama. Gina is a girl and Rama is a boy.

Are they same or different?

Students : Different.

Miss Raisa: Different. How about Gina and Betty?

Students : Same.

Miss Raisa: Betty is a girl and Gina is a girl. Are they same or different?

Students : Same.

Miss Raisa: Same. How about Kevin and Haga? Are they same or different?

“same” or “different”. Making an option for young children is usually used to give a clue for the answer instead of having open-ended question that have many possibilities to answer. In other words, the students will easily determine the answer based on the coordinated binomial phrases used.

Other formulaic expressions

Formulaic expressions can be classified into a different category in spoken language features in addition to lexical bundles, idiomatic phrases, free combination of verb + particle, coordinated binomial phrases, and question tags. Although some idiomatic phrases are formulaic expressions, the category “formulaic expression” is separated to “idiomatic phrase” since it encompasses other expressions that are usually used in conversation.

From the recordings, the use of formulaic expressions occurs 381 times in teachers’ production and 218 times in students’ production. These expressions are used for various purposes. Some expressions such as “thank you” and “thanks” are used to show gratitude. Moreover, expression such as “good morning” is aimed at expressing

greetings. In addition, some one-word expressions such as “yes” and “no” are used to show agreement and disagreement. Another example of formulaic expressions can be seen in the following conversation that shows how formulaic expressions are used in conversation when Haga and his partner, Keina, play with the water (filling the water into the bottle) together.

Example 6

Keina: Let’s go!

Haga: Wait for me.

Based on the conversation, it shows that both Keina and Haga produce the imperative clauses such as “let’s go!” and “wait for me” as a whole unit that cannot be easily derived from the individual parts. In addition, they tend to produce these pre-fabricated expressions spontaneously. It also shows that they tend to produce simple expressions to communicate with their peers while they are playing. It resembles the previous study (Griva and Sivropoulou, 2009) that play offers young learners to be engaged in meaningful interaction using simple phrases.

CONCLUSION

First, the teachers are seen to use five features of spoken English; *lexical bundles*, *idiomatic phrases*, *free combination of verb + particle*, *coordinated binomial phrases*, and *other formulaic expressions* within eight days. These utterances produced by the teachers are exposures for the students to learn English. Therefore, the students could learn by imitating the utterances used by the teachers and by modifying or adapting or even expanding what they are exposed to based on their creativity in producing spoken language utterances.

Second, it indicates that the students also produce the five features of spoken English. It can be seen that play-based instructions in immersion context are seen to be effective to engage children to get sufficient exposures of language use in order to lead them to yield spoken language features. These utterances seem to be useful and meaningful since these are used to accompany their actions for various functions such as exchanging goods and services, asking for preference, attracting one’s attention, giving commands, expressing agreement and disagreement, negotiating tasks, and providing suggestions.

Third, both the teachers and students show greater productivity on two features of spoken English; *lexical bundles* and *other formulaic expressions*. With regard to other features, the teachers

and students produce *idiomatic phrases*, *free combination of verb + particle*, and *coordinated binomial phrases* within all sessions although these features occur only a couple of times. In conclusion, the most frequent features may be the most easily acquired features through play-based learning.

This study is limited to a small number of kindergarteners since it is conducted in one classroom setting that involves only eleven children. It could not represent a wide variety of students in the school. In addition, this study is limited to a short period of time which intensively takes only eight days (two weeks) to collect data. It could not capture the development of spoken language production. Therefore, future research should extend the number of participants and duration on data collection in order to obtain the richness of spoken language production and generalize the present findings.

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