THE ACQUISITION OF CONVERSATIONAL IMPLICATURES BY A FIVE YEAR OLD INDONESIAN CHILD

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to describe types, processes and reasons of the conversational implicatures uttered by a five-year-old Indonesian child. The subject is the writer’s own son living in Lau Dendang, Kec Percut Sei Tuan, Kab Deli Serdang. It was a qualitative research design which was observed with a single case study. The instruments used were observation and interview. The researcher observed the subject for three months where conversation in different contexts in daily activities took place. An interview toward the subject’s care givers was conducted to get the subject’s reasons in uttering the conversational implicatures in his daily activities. The data collected were the utterances spoken by the subject in different contexts and interview. The data were analyzed by using the theory of language acquisition and conversational implicatures. The results of this study were: (1) The two types of conversational implicatures namely generalized conversational implicature involving clausal implicature and scalar implicature and particularized conversational implicature were uttered by the subject in his daily activities in different contexts. (2) The process of producing conversational implicatures occurred by flouting maxims. (3) The reasons of using conversational implicatures based on the maxim analysis were : to say opinion, to advise, to refuse, to defend self, to make a joke, to guess, to do something soon, to inform, to say like, to ask something, to say dislike, to avoid discomfort, to ask help, to avoid quarrel, to stay at something, to avoid the next question, to play imagination, to change like and to imitate. The reasons of using conversational implicatures based on the speakers’ background analysis was the interaction in community.

Key Words : Language Acquisition, Conversational Implicatures, Flouting Maxims

1. Introduction

The study of children’s language acquisition is always interesting to investigate. There are still many puzzles found by the researchers. It’s about how they acquire the very complex system of language such as phonetics, syntax, semantics and pragmatics which are related to each other and interwoven in a single unity. Dealing with pragmatics acquisition, especially about conversational implicatures, the phenomena about what types of conversational implicatures have been acquired and how they are used by children become actual researches. It is in line with the different subjects with different ages investigated and also different approaches applied so it results different findings by those researchers.

For example about the phenomenon of conversational implicatures acquisition can be seen on Fahmi, a five-year-old Indonesian child. One day, suddenly he approached his mother and said ‘Mi…gak usahlah sekolah ya.’ (Mom. I do not want to go to school). Her mother at first was confused with her son’s expression because during two weeks after registering her son in Kindergarten School, Fahmi looked very happy and was eager to begin to study at school. But the writer’s surprise did not emerge any more since Fahmi answered her mother’s question by saying ‘Iya. Lama kali pun sekolahnya. Makanya gak usah daftar aja.’ (Yeah. It’s so inform, to say dislike, to avoid discomfort, as conversational implicature since the utterance is not the same with the speaker’s intention. The words ‘gak usah – do not want’ does not mean as the literal meaning of the words but actually is influenced by the context that the speaker, Fahmi, is not patient any more waiting for the time for starting school at kindergarten. So, what is said by Fahmi is not the same as what is meant by Fahmi himself actually.

Grice (1975:158) is the first person who introduces the term of implicature gives the notion of a conversational implicature as one kind of implicature beside a conventional implicature to account for the fact that sentences can imply things that are not directly encoded as part of their meaning. Instead, the implicatures are computed as a relation between what is said and what could have been said based on general principles of cooperation between participants in a conversation. He formulates the Co-operative Principle as ‘Make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it
occurs’, and the Co-operative Maxims or known as the Conversational Maxims as the principle which consists of four maxims, namely; quality maxim, quantity maxim, relation maxim and manner maxim.

The example of conversational implicature and the violation or the flout of the maxim can be seen in the conversation between A and B in the context of office. A: “Do you have any Decolgen?” B: “I have some Bodrex, but at home”. In this example, it can be seen that the answer of B to A does not exist expectedly. There is flout of the maxim, namely relation maxim. The expected answer is ‘yes’, ‘there is Decolgen in my shelf’ (in the office), but unexpectedly, the answer is ‘there is the other medicine namely Bodrex and it is at home.’ However, the speaker A can understand that actually the interlocutor B just intends to make a joke by saying that he has no Decolgen but Bodrex as the same kind of medicine for headache but it is at home. So, the implicature of this dialog is that ‘B does not have any Decolgen in his hand or in the office.’

Grice divides conversational implicature into two subcategories; particularized conversational implicature and generalized conversational implicature, and the generalized conversational implicature itself is divided into two, namely scalar implicature and clausal implicature.

Several previous studies prove that children’s acquisition of implicature in different ages have different ability in using implicature. For example, a study by Pessy (2006) which focuses on the speech acts and implicatures, she also has the same assumption as Lande’s that the types of implicature acquired by a four-year-old child still in very limited concepts and just got in the purpose to express what the child wants.

In accordance with the explanation above, in this research the writer is interested in studying about conversational implicatures acquisition by a child of five-year-old as a case study on Fahmi, the writer’s own son. The topic of conversational implicatures itself is chosen due to the reason as Levinson (1983:97) states that the notion of conversational implicature is the single most important idea in Pragmatics.

Unlike the previous researches which are not detailed in discussing the types and the processes of implicatures acquired, this study further wants to analyze the implicature types acquired by the subject, Fahmi, by using Grice theory (1975) of implicatures with the cooperative principle and conversational maxims analysis. In addition, this study also wants to analyze how the child uses those types of implicature in his daily conversation with the others around him.

In line with this description, the writer decides to investigate what, how a five-year-old child who includes in the Concrete Operational Period acquires conversational implicatures. As we know that children in this period are considered to be active speakers with good speaking to communicate his mind. That’s why the writer is interested in observing the child in this age.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

a. Language Acquisition

Language acquisition is the language acquired in the first few years of the child. From this meaning, then the term of language acquisition usually refers to the first language acquisition. It is a process by which a language capability develops in human beings which concerns with the development of language in children. It is a process used by children to adapt a series of hypothesis which appears with the parents’ utterances until they select and use them in a certain structure of language. It takes a comprehensive look at where and when children acquire a first language which interates social and cognitive approaches to how children analyze, understand, and produce sounds, words, and sentences as they learn to use language to cooperate and achieve goals (Clark, 2003:1).

1) The Process of Language Acquisition

There are a number of theories of the process of first language (L1) acquisition, and these can be grouped in various ways such as behaviorist (that imitation and practice as primary processes in language development), innatist (that children are biologically programmed for language and that language develops in the child in just the same way with other biological functions develop) and interactionist (that the role-play of the linguistic environment in interaction with the child’s innate capacities determines language development).

Chomsky (1965) proposes refers to children’s capacity as language acquisition device (LAD) that prepares children to make sense of language. The language acquisition device is also referred to as universal grammar (UG). The LAD takes in the input that comprises of sentences of the language and produces the output in the form of mental grammar of the language. This is illustrated in the figure below.
The data of the language consists of the input that children are exposed to and pick up in his environment; mainly from parents, siblings, playmates and relations. To young children, the utterances occurring at earshot are like a "bunch of noise". Chomsky (1965) points that the language that children hears is full of confusing information, for instance, false starts, incomplete sentences, slips of the tongue, and does not provide children with the information they need. He further argues that the language that children are exposed to is both limited in quality and quantity. Children may hear only grammatically correct sentences of adult but normally no information of what is ungrammatical. Parents do not usually explain or give feedback about the grammaticality of a language. Children create the grammar in their mind without paying conscious attention to language learning. What is important for successful language acquisition is that there must be adequate samples of language from which children can create grammar.

2) Factors that Influence Language Acquisition and Development

As quoted by Boysson and Bardies, Taylor (1990:230-231) said that in language acquisition, a child is affected by three factors: the language to be acquired, the child who acquires it and the setting where he/she acquires it. In line with this, but in another words with more specifically terms, Jhonston (2006: 2-3) said that there is also considerable agreement that the course of language acquisition and development reflects the interplay of factors in at least five domains: social, perceptual, cognitive processing, conceptual and linguistic. Theorists differ in the emphasis and degree of determination posited for a given domain, but most would agree that each is relevant. There is a large body of research supporting the view that language acquisition is influenced by many aspects of human experience and capability.

3) Stages in Pragmatics Acquisition

As the development of language itself, the study of it namely Linguistics has several branches of field. They are phonetics, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. These complex fields are related to each other and interwoven in a single unity. Humans acquire all of this ability during their life in line with their maturity. It starts since they were born in this world on top of that in their mothers’ uterus or during pregnancy.

Dealing with Pragmatics acquisition as the focus of this study, as quoted by Rohg, Bates (1976) describes in her work that there are three stages taking place in children’s pragmatics acquisition. It occurs before the children’s linguistic behaviour reaches the same level of linguistic competence as adults. The three stages of pragmatic acquisition are the Sensor motor Period, which applies to 18 month-old babies; the Preoperational Period, which describes the pragmatic competence between the age of 18 months and 4 years and the Concrete Operational Period, which refers to four- to six-year-old children. Children’s developments in these stages are also related to important social and cognitive developments of that age-group.

b. Context

Grundy (2000: 72) states that in the case of implicature, context helps us to determine what is conveyed implicitly but not explicitly stated by the speaker. He (2000: 107) also adds that context is not treated as given common ground, but rather as a set of more or less accessible items of information which are stored in short term and encyclopedic memories or manifest in the physical environment. He further says that there are three kinds of contextual information in Pragmatics which help us to understand the language used by the speakers. The first context is called Physical context. It encompasses what is physically present around the speakers/hearers at the time of communication. What objects are visible, where the communication is taking place, what is going on around, etc. The second is linguistic context. It is the context which refers to what has been said before in the conversation or in another words, the history of things said so far. The last kind of contextual information is social context, the social relationship of the people involved in communication.

c. Conversational Implicature

As stated previously in the paragraphs above, the theory of conversational implicature was first proposed by Herbert Paul Grice, who is an American linguistic philosopher. H. P. Grice delivered three speeches in his William James lectures at Harvard University in 1967. Among these, the second lecture entitled “Logic and Conversation” came out in 1975 in Syntax and Semantics. There, he presented the theory of “Cooperative Principle” and “Conversational Implicature.”

In order to understand comprehensively and thoroughly the purpose and the significance of the proposition of “cooperative principle” and
“conversational implicature,” we should figure out some ideas of Grice’s basic theory about “meaning,” which can be divided into natural meaning and non-natural meaning.

Natural meaning refers to the meaning of the utterance that can be generally gained by the conversational participants. While the non-natural meaning refers to the intended meaning conveyed by the speaker and must be inferred by the receiver in particular contexts. On the base of it, Grice proposed the key ideas of conversational implicature in 1967. If the participants both have the expectation to achieve a successful conversation, they must cooperate with each other, and speak sincerely, sufficiently, relevantly and clearly. To put it another way, they must observe the co-operative principle and the maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relation (also called Relevance) and Manner. If someone who participates the conversation flouts the co-operative principle and any of the maxims, he must have intended to do so. And the receiver can infer the speaker’s intended meaning in particular contexts. For example:

A: Do you know when John left the pub last night?
B: Eleven o’clock. And he went to Mary’s apartment instead of his own.

According to quantity maxim, the contribution should not be more informative than is required. In this way, in the example, as the answer to A, generally, “Eleven o’clock,” is enough. However, B adds the later sentence, provides some information that seems not necessary and violates the quantity maxim. We infer that B wants to tell A that John might have some special relationship with Mary.

Explaining the definition of conversational implicative, it accounts for the fact that sentences can imply things that are not directly encoded as part of their meaning. Instead, the implicatures are computed as a relation between what is said and what could have been said based on general principles of cooperation between participants in a conversation (Grice, 1975).

1) Types of Conversational Implicature

There are two types of conversational implicature namely generalized conversational implicature and particularized conversational implicature. Generalized conversational implicature is divided into two namely clausal implicature and scalar implicature. Generalized Conversational Implicative occurs without reference to any particular features of the contexts (Levinson, 1983:126). In other words, special background knowledge or inferences are not required in calculating the additional conveyed meaning. For instance in Levinson, Grice notes that in general ‘whenever you say (i) means you implicate (ii)’. For instance: (i) A man stole a car. (ii) The car was not the man’s car.

Scalar implicature is a conversational inference that attributes an implicit meaning beyond the explicit or literal meaning of an utterance, and which suggests that the speaker had a reason for not using a more informative or stronger term on the same scale. For example, when we say that some people have already arrived, we also imply that not all people have arrived. It is an alternative way to represent quantity besides using numerical data.

Clausal implicature refers to an inference by an addressee concerning the truth of a proposition expressed in a particular subordinate or coordinate clause. In other words, it is inference concerning the truth of an embedded proposition. The addressee infers that the proposition may or may not be true. For example: If we believe that tomorrow will be raining, it is also possible that tomorrow will be sunny. So we say: “If tomorrow will not be raining, we go to the beach”.

While, in contrast with Generalized, Particularized Conversational Implicative is strongly tied to the particular features of the context. In this specific context, locally recognized inferences are assumed. Generally, the existence of this implicature will lead to the flout of Gricean maxims.

2) Cooperative Principle

As Grice (1975) states, speakers intend to be cooperative in conversation. In communication, participants are required to say the truth, be relevant and try to be as clear as possible (Yule, 1996). For this reason, Grice (1975) formulates a general ‘Cooperative Principle’ which is elaborated in four sub-principles called maxims. This principle can be briefly described as “Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Grice, 1975:26).

Within this principle, he suggests four maxims: quality, quantity, relevance and manner. Quality maxim deals with the truthfulness of the given information, quantity maxim with the definite amount of required information given by the speaker, and relevance maxim with the relevancy of information that the speaker contributes especially in relation to the ongoing context. Manner maxim deals with the way how participants convey their message.
clearly and execute their performance with reasonable dispatch. The theory is designed to explain and predict the interpretation of a conversational implicature.

3) The Process of Conversational Implicature

According to Brasoveanu (2006), an implicature arises by flouting the maxims of Cooperative Principles. The maxim is *flouted* means that the hearer recognizes that and comes up with an explanation for the speaker’s behavior. If one of the maxims is violated by some utterance, and yet we are still assuming that person is cooperating with us in communication, we can take that violation as a sign that something is being said indirectly. This is called exploiting or flouting An evidence that children can acquire knowledge of language without formal instruction in a variety of different circumstances supports the linguistic theory or more specifically linguistic nativism. Basically, this view holds that the development of language takes place through the processes that are unique to human language and that are present in the human brain at birth. The structure in language is independent of language use and that children are endowed with a special ability to acquire this structure. This dedicated ability is derived from the innate capacity to learn a language. a maxim (deliberately violating it). Consider the example below:

“Do you like Jill’s new car?”
(Maxims Obeyed)
“I’d drive across the country in it.”
(Maxims Flouted)
“The windshield is very clear

The example above shows that the process of using conversational implicature relation maxim is by flouting relation maxim. The question whether the addressee likes or not Jill’s new car is replied by saying another thing that even it actually answers the question implicitly but irrelevant.

The process of conversational implicature involves four ways. They are by flouting quantity maxim, flouting quality maxim, flouting relation maxim and flouting manner maxim. The example of one of them has been explained above.

Flouting a maxim is typically done by uttering something absurdly false, wholly uninformative, completely irrelevant, or obscure so that the addressee understands the speaker is implying something entirely different. This is how metaphors get resolved.

d. Reasons for Using Conversational Implicature

1) Reasons based on the maxims analysis

According to Brown and Yule, there are four reasons people produce conversational implicatures in their utterances. They are to avoid a deep evaluation from the addressee and to state opinion, to want to get other’s trust and to save selves by lying, to explain based on the expectation and to avoid discomfort things and to show up the knowledge and intelligence and to avoid confrontation.

2) Reasons Based on the Speaker’s Background

While, according to Hao in Thao (2011:7), he raises a question why people avoid saying explicitly or indicating literal meaning instead of saying implicitly, which sometimes challenges the hearer. He showed that conversational implicatures were produced because of the complicated requirements of social communication, of the interaction in community, of the distinctive culture and of the trends towards the beauty.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

a. The Research Design

This study employed 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. Design decisions are made throughout the study – at the end as well as the beginning. Further, a qualitative research has five features, namely having natural setting and making the researcher as the key instrument, using descriptive words, concerning with process rather than simply with products, analyzing data inductively and having meaning as the essential concern. So, based on this definition, the way in which this study conducted followed those items quoted.

So far, this study for more specifically used 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. Further, it looks intensely at an individual or small participant pool, drawing conclusions only about that participant or group and only in that specific context. Therefore, based on the understanding above, it is suitable for this research to use case study as the major data gathering technique since the researcher observed the conversational implicature acquired by a five-year-old-Indonesian child.

b. The Instruments of the Data

For collecting sufficient data, observation and interview was carried out as the instrument.
Spradley (1980:54) states that observation is done to engage in activities appropriate to the situation and to observe the activities, people and physical aspects of the situation. Thus, the observation in this research was done everyday in the whole situation since the subject lives with the researcher. Writing tools such as book and pen were used to note everything deals with the conversational implicature acquisition of the subject during his speaking with the researcher and others especially what deals with the context because it can not be captured by a tool of recorder. In addition, much of the same information can be gathered by interviewing, in this case by means of oral questions about the implicatures of the subject’s utterances presented to the subject’s caregivers, in this case, they are the subject’s father and aunt, as the other caregivers beside the subject’s mother. In addition, video recorder from laptop which was always used by the researcher in her daily activities at home were also applied to record the child’s utterances, since this tool was not realized by the subject that he could utter his sentences naturally.

c. Data Analysis

In this analysis, it was conducted by on going analysis and after collecting the entire data (Huberman and Mile, 1984:27). The purpose of the analysis model consists of three concurrent steps:
1) Data reduction
2) data display and
3) conclusion drawing or verification

The points out that the procedures are: (a) Selecting the data which are relevant to the research, summarizing or paraphrasing the data which is in the form of words and subsuming which means grouping the data into the similar category. (b) Displaying some matrices which consist of some data from the subject’s utterances in different contexts (c) Deciding what the data means or finding the pattern or regularities after reading the matrices or display.

d. The Trustworthiness of the Study

In qualitative research, data must be auditable through checking that the interpretations are credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable. These are called as the trustworthiness. To fulfill these requirements, the writer did four of them as follow:
1) Credibility

The credibility of a research involves the data and the findings. For making this research is credible, the researcher used triangulation technique. As stated by Burns in Rusyani (2008), triangulation is a way of arguing that if different methods of investigation produce the same result then the data are likely to be valid. Therefore, to verify the data, in this technique, the writer used data source, situation and data collection. Triangulation of data source was done by taking data from a variety of mood, time and place. Triangulation of situation was done by observing the same subject in different situations and triangulation of data collection was done by using multiple tools or instruments for more accurate data collected which was reached by using video recorder. While, to verify the findings, the researcher interviewed the subject’s caregivers in order to confirm the reasons and purposes of the student’s utterances and the researcher then discussed her interpretation and conclusion with her thesis consultants. The discussion was done to examine the product - the records from their points of view.

2) Transferability

The transferability of this research was achieved by a thick description of the research process and finding. The description which is called sending contexts to help the readers to see whether the results can be transferred to other different settings.

3) Dependability

To make sure that the finding is dependable can be done by deliberately checking and jotting down the process and result of the research. This process is called audit trail. In this requirement of trustworthiness, the researcher deliberately jotted down the complete process of research which was done through observation and interview.

4) Confirmability

To make the research is confirmable, the writer made an audit trail which consists of raw data, reduced data and reconstructed data. In addition, some codes and appendices were also made so the readers can easily understand the data.

4. FINDINGS

After analyzing the data deliberately, there are some findings found. The findings of the research are as follow:

1) It was found that the child has acquired the two types of conversational implicatures and also the combination of them. They are generalized conversational implicatures (which involves clausal implicate and scalar implicature), particularized conversational implicature and a combination of clausal implicature and particularized implicature. These types are
acquired by the child mostly due to the social factor.

2) It was found that the child used the two processes of uttering conversational implicatures namely flouting the four maxims i.e. maxim of quantity, quality, relation and manner. The process of flouting those maxims occurred when the child refused command, when he told his opinion and when he revealed his prediction. In accordance with the finding no 1, social factor dominantly becomes the one triggering mostly the child’s ability. The process of language acquisition as proposed by Chomsky (1965) i.e. input ---- → LAD --- → output, is applied well.

3) There were various kinds of the child’s reasons in uttering his sentences. The purposes based on the maxims analysis were concluded into 19 categories, namely: (1) to say opinion, (2) to advise, (3) to refuse, (4) to defend self, (5) to make a joke, (6) to guess, (7) to do something soon, (8) to inform, (9) to say like, (10) to ask something, (11) to say dislike, (12) to avoid discomfort, (13) to ask help, (14) to avoid quarrel, (15) to stay at something, (16) to avoid the next question, (17) to play imagination, (18) to change like and (19) to imitate. Besides, among the reasons based on the speakers’ background, there was only one of them found in this research namely interaction in community. Dealing with the theory of language acquisition, all of those reasons are affected by the environment or situation where the child was triggered to produce those utterances. This can be seen through the various contexts as displayed in the appendices.

5. CONCLUSIONS

After deliberately analyzing the data, the conclusions are stated as follows:

1) The two types of conversational implicatures namely clausal implicature and scalar implicature and particularized implicature in the child’s utterances are found in different contexts. In addition, a combination of both of them namely clausal implicature and particularized conversational implicature is also found.

2) The four processes of uttering conversational implicatures namely by flouting maxims (quantity, quality, relation and manner maxims) occurred in the child’s utterances. Those processes occurred when the child refused command, when he told his opinion and when he revealed his prediction.

3) There are various kinds of the child’s purposes as his reasons in uttering his sentences. The purposes based on the maxims analysis found as the theory given involve 12 categories, namely: (1) to say opinion, (2) to advise, (3) to defend self, (4) to make a joke, (5) to inform, (6) to say like, (7) to ask something, (8) to say dislike, (9) to avoid discomfort, (10) to ask help, (11) to avoid quarrel and (12) to avoid the next question. While, there are 9 categories found beside those reasons namely (1) to refuse, (2) to guess, (3) to do something soon, (4) to stay at something, (5) to play imagination, (6) to change like and (7) to imitate an action. Beside, among the reasons based on the speakers’ background, there was only one of them found in this research namely interaction in community. The other factors were not found because of the subject’s maturity.

6. REFERENCES


