A PRAGMATICS DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIES IN ASSISTING CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

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Abstract

The paper presents the quality of systemic language exploitation as strategies conducted by a teacher of autism centre in Surakarta. She is a professional who cares and treats children with autism. Data for the discussion were collected from one parenting session carried out by such a teacher and a child with autism. The analysis searched the multimodal strategies carried out by the teacher to set up interactions with the child. The results show that in addition to the verbal resources, interactions with the exceptional child were established through the non-verbal behaviour. The teacher always equipped her utterances with body movements, facial gestures as well as paralinguistic resource such as intonation and loudness of the speech. It is expected that the results of this small research can be beneficial for teachers or parents of children with autism in order to make them interact with other people.

Keywords: *child with autism, multimodal, verbal, non-verbal, systemic*

1. Introduction

The paper is based on a small project to see the quality of language exploitation performed by a teacher of children with autism in an autism center in Surakarta. A pragmatics analysis was conducted to investigate how she formulate politeness strategies to effectively asssit and mind one child with autism. In addition, the formulation is also seen from the way she exploits the language systemically in her teaching session.

A systemic analysis was conducted to investigate the effective as well as the ineffective verbal and non-verbal characteristics carried out by the teacher in handling a learning session with a child. As treatment for children with autism have been focused more on the psychological as well as neurological aspects than the linguistic one, this study would like to elaborate how linguistic aspect is as important as the other two to consider for the treatment. The results of the analysis are expected to become a good model of interaction strategy for teachers as well as parents of children with autism in minding and assisting them.

Helping a child who suffers autism to interac with other participant is a hard work. Most of them do not understand what is being communicated (Schuler and Fletcher:2003). Furthermore, s/he usually tend to perform unpredicted and uncontrolled behavior that will have role in influenceing the communication. In line with this condition, Shulman (2003) suggested a child with autism tends get difficulty in playing roles. Therefore, assumably s/he gets trouble with other children in using language for playing. The other linguistic feature a child with autism shows is that s/he likes to repeat what someone else has produced in an interaction with her/ him (Wetherby, Prizant and Schuler: 2000).

Most children with autism seldom initiate an interaction. Further, if it is initiated, they do not give response to the initiating utterances or if they do, the responses are executed in an unconsistent pattern. (Shulman, 2003). Ratey (in Fletcher and Schuler, 2003) explains that such a condition has roles in the process of interaction between children with autism and other normal kids. On that account, speaking slowly in clear manner to such children is strongly recommended.

To see whether language exploitation is systemically effective for communication can be done by analysing it using Systemic Functional Linguistics. As this theory has a functional concept to see how language is used in an interaction (Halliday, 1994), the process of

transferring skills and knowledge performed by teachers to children suffering autism can be one object of analysis. Strategies which are designed and executed by the teachers to build a communication with the children will demonstrate their efforts to exploit language supporting their job in transferring skills and knowledge to the exceptional children. The term systemic for the exploitation is considered to be related to the selected multimodal system the teachers have, at least the verbal as well as the non-verbal behaviour they perform in the teaching process. In this speech event, the former is more associated with what so termed lexicogrammar—the strategy for making grammatical constructions and the choice of words used in the interaction. Meanwhile, the latter is seen from the way the teachers create body language, facial gestures, intonation, and some paralinguistic aspects such as intonation, pitch, tone, and so on.

Grammar quality performed by the teacher becomes the focus of study in this article. She shows how to treat the children through status, affect, and contact. Types of clauses accomotating types of functional speech acts are performed by the teacher in the teaching session. Several speech acts are chosen for such a session, namely giving information, demanding, and commanding, and so on. As elaborated by systemists (Halliday, 1994: 70-71; Eggins, 1994: 154; Gerot and Wignell, 1995), the main grammar elements in one clause construing meaning for negotiation is Subject and Finite. On that account, if a clause is exploited by the teacher to negotiate with the kid, the grammatical construction should have these main elements.

Methodology

One learning session performed by a female teacher to a boy was selected for the study. The class was handled by Miss Tyas for Farid. The child shows capability to respond in verbal mode. The session was cut into exchanges between the teacher and the child. Each exchange consists of inititating move from the teacher and responding one from the boy. One move may convey several turns, and each turn may have one or several act(s) in it. From this pattern of interaction, the language exploitation—both verbal and non verbal—is desribed to see the systemic quality of the communication strategy.

Results and Discussion

The transaction performed by Miss Tyas as the teacher and Farid as the child is built up of 75 exchanges—in each of it negotiation between them happens. The transaction is about transferring calculating skill to the child. Eventhough in most of the exchanges the teacher only has one turn, whithin in the turns she may have one utterance representing an act or more than one utterance for different acts. On the other hand, the child with autism in participating in the exchange mostly performs one act for each turn and one turn for each exchange.

In all the exchanges, the teacher always executes an initiating move to the kid. Put in other words, in this transaction she always tries to make the child interact with her, while he only performs a responding move to the teacher. Both the initiating and repsonding moves are delivered through both modes—verbal as well as non verbal behavior. There are several interesting characteristics of language exploitation performed by the teacher in handling the class such as the types of act in the turns, the grammatical construction of the clauses for the utterances, the word selection, the paralinguistik aspects, as well as the non verbal behavior going through the interaction.

Table1 number of exchange, turn and act in the transaction

Teacher			Child		
Exchange	Turn	Act	Exchange	Turn	Act
75	79	177	75	76	75 (20 in non verbal mode)

Through the interaction, both the teacher and the child have the same numbers of exchange, that is 75. This means that within the interaction the teacher has those number of trials to transfer mathematic skill to the kid and he tries to respond to the efforts. However, in the exchanges she has, the teacher should have 79 turns and 177 acts to realize the transferring trials, while the kid only possesses 76 turns and 75 acts of which 20 of them are in the forms of non verbal behavior. In several exchanges, the teacher should have two turns in them because the second turn supports the first one in trying the kid respond to her. Meanwhile, the boy only has one exchange consisting of two turns in which he supports his first verbal turn with the non verbal one.

The most interesting features of the language exploitation in the interaction are demonstrated by the types of act selected by the teacher and the child. The first participant only selects three types from the five classifications of speech acts suggested by several pragmatists (such as Thomas, 1995; Verschueren, 1999), namely assertive, directive and expressive—commissive and performative speech acts do not appear in the interacton Under the first type of the speech act, the speech acts of telling and acknowledging dominate the usage. These two acts are almost used in all exchanges in the interaction. Mostly the former is exploited by the teacher to tell certain on coming activity after one has been done, while the latter is executed after the child provides an answer for a question from the teacher.

The second classification of the speech act is realized by the act of asking, commanding, and inviting in which the first two are dominative through the interaction. This fact is clearly related to the job of the teacher; as she wants to train the child with arithmatic skill, making the child do verbal as well as verbal responses related to aritmathic problems as well as making him provide answers for the problem are two acts that are carried out the teacher. By asking, the teacher provides a question to the child which is not a real question but rather a check for the child understanding. Meanwhile, with a command she makes the child do some spoken response to the aritmathic problem given or to make him write down the answer, or to make him do certain physical action such holding a pen, pick his book, and so on. When an exercise has been finished by the child, and the teacher wants to proceed to the next one, she delivers an invitation for it.

There are three types of expressive speech acts which are selected by the teacher in the interaction—they are praising, cheering, and celebrating. The first one is performed by the teacher to appreciate what the kid has done or has accomplished and at the same time she reinforces him with the process of learning. This kind of speech act dominates the number of usage meaning that the teacher almost uses it in all exchanges in the interaction. Further, to appreciate what the child has done and at the same time congratulating him for the achievement, the teacher conducts a cheering act. This often goes together with a celebrating in which the teacher celebrated the achievement the kid has reached by performing *a give me ten* action.

These three classifications of speech acts selected by the teacher are very often go together in one exchange. Put in other words, they are often used in combination, for example, after the teacher delivers an aritmatic problem in the form of question, then she acknowledge the answer given by the kid, and then expressively she praises him for the correct answer, and sometimes she continues it with a cheer as well as a celebration with the kid. The following table show s the types of speech act performed by the teacher.

Table 2 Types of Speech Acts Performed by the Teacher

Assertive	Directive	Commissive	Expressive	Performative
Acknowledging Telling	Asking Commanding Inviting	---	Praising Cheering Celebrating	-----

On the other hand, through the interaction the child only carries out three types of speech acts under the classification of assertive. He does not have any other type of speech act. As the teacher dominates the exchange with her questions, the child mostly responds to the teacher initiating move with answers in which he provides answers for the aritmathic problems given by the instructor. Meanwhile, the response to the commands are realized in two version. The first is a verbal comply with a command in which the child counts the teacher's fingers for an aritmathic problem provided by the teacher. On the other hand, a non verbal action is executed to respond to a command demanding a physical action such as holding a pen, write down the answer, and so on. The table below demonstrates the types of speech acts done by the child in the interaction.

Table 3 Tyeps of Speech Acts Performed by the Child

Assertive	Directive	Commissive	Expressive	Performative
Answering Verbal Complying with a Commanding Non verbal complying with a commanding	---	---	---	-----

Most of the speech acts perfomed by the teacher are realized in mood structure in the form of elliptic construction. For example, to deliver a question for an aritmathic problem which completely shoud be *Berapa empat tambah tiga?* (What is four plus three?), the teacher only says *Berapa ini?* (How many?). Even though this interrogative sentence is ellipted, the meaning is systemically provided from the supporting non verbal behavior such as the fingers forwarded to the child while she is providing the elliptic question, or from the intonation going along with the question such a rising intonation for *Empat tambah tiga*? (Four plus three?).

Related to non verbal behavior, the teacher and the child show three types, namely body language, facial gestures, and paralinguistic aspect going with the verbal resource. The teacher uses her fingers in most of exchanges she initiates for the supporting the aritmathic problems for the kid. In addition to this, she also performs several physical action going along with the commanding she delivers to the child such as providing a note book for the kid after she commands him to write down the answer of a problem, or giving him a pen after commanding him to hold the pen, and so on. The other non verbal behavior is facial gestures. The teacher always makes an eye contact with the kid while she is initiating and interacting with him. In addition, she also smiles in the interaction.

The exchanges get more effective when the teacher also uses paralinguistic aspects for the speech acts she has. Normal pace of the speech is performed to build interaction between her and the kid. Meanwhile, slow speech is executed to help the kid catch the message being encoded. She cuts words into syllables such as *bo-la* (ball), *ti-ga* (three), *bi-ru* (blue) and so on.

In supporting all the strategies above, the teacher still tries to make the learning process go as effective as possible. She uses an addressing term *sayang* (honey) which shows good and close relationship between her and the child. Furthermore, she constructs close proximity with the child and often touches the child's hands in showing her attention.

In reaction to the verbal and non verbal behavior the teacher has for him, the child demonstrates various movements. Most of the non verbal behaviors performed by the child are executed for complying with commands given by the teacher. Except for that, he also has

uncontrolled movements which do not show any message toward the initiating moves forwarded by the teacher. The back-forth movement is a special physical feature demonstrated by any child with autism.

4. Conclusion

The teacher in this project shows systemic language exploitation in her teaching-leraning process with her child with autism through grammar quality, lexical choices, gestures and so on. She skillfully adjust types of speech acts for the child and she totally initiate all exchanges occuring between her and the kid. She uses assertive, directive, and expressive speech acts in one exchage for her and the child. The language quality is effective enough as the teacher succesfully makes the child respond to the initiating acts of the teacher correctly..

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