

CHAPTER II

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE OBJECT OF THE STUDY

2.1. LEVELS OF WORD DEFINITION MATURITY

One of the factors that influences a child's ability to define words is the age growth. A child's maturity in learning to define words increased with age, that is partly caused by the cognitive development. The older a child is, the more complete word definition he gives. Litowitz (1977) in Taylor and Taylor examined the definitions given by children aged between 4; 5 – 7; 5 in IQ tests and distinguished five levels of maturity as follows:

2.1.1. NONVERBAL OR VERBALLY EMPTY RESPONSES

Being given a question to answer, a child usually gives nonverbal or verbally empty responses. There are three reasons why such phenomenon happens. First of all, a child might not understand what the question is. Instead of asking the question giver to repeat it as an adult does, a child ignores it and keeps silent. Furthermore, nodding and shaking head are the most common signal of nonverbal responses.

Secondly, a child might not be in the mood to answer the question. He does not give an answer at all for the reason of not knowing the question giver or is asked to give definition in an uncomfortable situation. However, doing a

reinforcement method and creating a comfortable situation are the best ways to solve it.

Thirdly, a child gives an unrelated answer to the question. Being asked to define words in times not wanting to, a child answers the question with a totally different association of ideas. As I observe, when a four – and – a half-year-old was asked *apa babi itu?* (Ind., meaning *what is a pig?*), then he answered *ayo nggambar mobil !* (Ind., meaning *let's draw a car!*). Here, there is no apparent basis for the wrong use of words by the child.

2.1.2. GESTURE

A child aged 4; 5 – 5 years old finds it hard to define verbs verbally. He knows and does everyday actions but cannot define them in terms of words. In time of being asked to define the action, he makes gesture instead of explaining by using words.

For instance, in defining the word *menyetir** (Ind., meaning *drive*) one child showed the act of driving. He held and turned a round can cover in the garage. He also shouted to imitate a car's horn. It is clear enough to show that he makes gesture to answer the question about verb.

2.1.3. RESPONSE WITH ASSOCIATES TO THE WORDS

A child talks about what is going on around him and tends to see things in his

*A Javanese word

own point of view as well as his response about words. He does not give a word a clear meaning directly but mentions other things relate to it. The more associated things he knows, the more complete definitions he gives.

What happens at a child of 4; 5 years old when asked to define *sendok* (Ind., meaning *spoon*) naturally shows the fact. He gave the answer with related situational context in that *sendok* was identical to *garpu* (Ind., meaning *fork*). Furthermore, he gave additional information that *sendok* was to hold on the right hand while *garpu* on the left hand.

2.1.4. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Personal experience creates knowledge to the child's brain. Once he goes to school, his home experience widens for he gets along with friends and experiences the things he never did before. Sometimes in defining words, he adds the definition with his friend's experience instead of telling his own. In this case, the external input also supports a child's definition.

A child's personal experience relates to the everyday situation. In my observation, one child was asked what a taxi could be. Here is now his heavy reliance in response to taxi, *Aku pergi ke Timezone naik taksi* (Ind., meaning *I went to Timezone by taxi*). His response reflects his memorized personal experience.

2.1.5. AWARENESS OF A DEFINITIONAL FORM AND FUNCTION

__At the latest level, a child begins to be aware to give word definition based on its form and function. However, this awareness is only applicable to nouns only since he enjoys giving information on real things. A child is not an accomplished definition giver unless he attains this level. For example, he can define *mobil* (Ind., meaning *car*) as something big and has wheels, mirrors, and windows. Being asked for further response, he added that car was driven for far distance trip.

2.2. LIST OF THE DEFINED WORDS

In this study, I use Nelson's English list of early vocabulary in Bee 1981, in which I translated it into Indonesian for the reason of unavailability of related reference in Indonesian as well as the validity of the tasks in predicting defining achievement. However, since I would like to find out the precise word definition quality, under this heading, I choose everyday words known by the children.

No corresponding survey has taken place for Indonesian yet. However, since the children come from a variety of social backgrounds and engage in many kinds of activities during their day, it is likely that the figures will be fairly typical. So, there is no difficulty for the neither English nor Indonesian children to understand the parts – of – speech categories.

Below is the list of words stated by Nelson. It appears to represent different functions in the child's speech.

1. *Specific nominals* are words the child uses to name unique objects; people and animals such as: *mummy, daddy, and dog*.
2. *General nominals* are words the child uses for classes of objects, animals and people such as: *ball, car, milk, girl, he, that*
3. *Action words* are ones the child use to describe or accompany actions. They are also used to express or demand attention such as: *go, bye – bye, up, look, hi*
4. *Modifiers* are words that refer to properties or qualities of things such as: *big, red, pretty, hot, all gone, there or mine*.
5. *Personal – social words* are ones that say something about the child's feelings or social relationships, such as: *ouch, please, yes, no or want*.
6. *Function words* are ones that have only a grammar function such as *what, where, is, to or for*.

Based on the list above, I decide the words to be defined by my informants. From the first category, I take the words *anjing, mama, bapak* (Ind., meaning *dog, mummy, daddy*). *Permen, susu, mobil, robot, kipas angin, sendok, celana, rok, lampu meja* (Ind., meaning *candy, milk, car, robot, fan, spoon, pant, skirt, table lamp*) are words taken from the second category. Meanwhile, the words from the third category are *minum, menyetir* (Ind., meaning *drink, drive*). From the fourth category, I only take one word that is *gendut* (Ind., meaning *fat*).

Among those categories, I choose four out of six by excluding personal – social and function words since most of the earliest words known by the child

have something to do with classes of objects, people, animals and action they can do. Furthermore, the child at that age finds it hard to define the excluded categories. Besides, the vast majority of the child's vocabularies are used to name classes of objects (Nelson in Bee: 1975). This is the reason of choosing the defined words that are mostly taken from the second category.

2.3. WORD MEANING

Young children have been indicated to construct the meanings of particular words very gradually. According to Papalia and Olds there are two possibilities concerning the meaning of words; overgeneralization and over restriction. They may first over generalize a word by using it to stand for more things than a adult would. For example, one child calls all kinds of chicken "ok ok" [ɔk ɔk].

Children have also been found to over restrict the meaning of words. They use a word to represent fewer things than it does in adult language. For example, a child calls his uncle's car "boom boom" [bʊm bʊm]. This fact supports the theory of Taylor and Taylor (1990) as stated in the theoretical framework that the perceptual and characteristic features become the basis of over restriction.

As I observe, one child may tend to give a mismatch when he finds out that the answer to the question is beyond his brain capability. In answering the question "*Umurnya Mama berapa?*" (Ind. meaning *How old is mummy?*), his response is "*tiga belas tahun*" (Ind., meaning *thirteen years old*). However, there is usually no tracing back the association of ideas that has caused such misidentification.

Development of the ability to classify, to generalize and to think in relational terms is essential to the growth of cognitive development as well as age growth. Gibson and Levin (1985) have elaborated a conventional view about the development of children's word meaning. As they put:

"Meaning begins with the real things in the world, their distinctive features and events that have observable and predictable relations between things and people and action. Although children are aware of meanings in a real environmental context at an early age, before speech has developed to any great extent, it is a long time before they generalize meanings in a systematic aspect of language, both spoken and written."

2.4. WORD DEFINITION

Kindergartners define words in immature way. Taylor and Taylor in 1990 state that in defining verbs, preschoolers tend to mention only a few aspects of action. Those aspects include participants, objects, processes, instruments, situational contexts and locations.

In my observation, a child as young as 5 years of age possesses ability to integrate concrete features of semantic knowledge into a single defining statement. Only at age 9, the children's definitional form becomes indistinguishable from that of the adults (Taylor and Taylor: 1990). It includes concrete as well as abstract nouns. One thing should be remembered is that the ability to define verbs will also be in mature way by that age.

2.5. BACKGROUND OF INFORMANT 1

Dana is the first informant of this study. This 4; 8 years old boy is the only child of a middle interethnic Indonesian family. Both of his parents speak purely Indonesian to him. Before attending the TK Muhajirin Tompotika, he knew nothing about Javanese. However, he knows Javanese passively after getting along with most of his Javanese friends at kindergarten. Being a son of an engineer, he knows a lot about things related to cars.

2.6. BACKGROUND OF INFORMANT 2

Yola is the second informant of this study. She is 4;6 years old and has one sibling. Her mother is a high school teacher and her father is an employee of state owned oil company. Both of her parents speak Indonesian to her. She attends TK Saint Anna Surabaya.

2.7. BACKGROUND OF INFORMANT 3

Grace is the third informant of this study. This 4;7 years old girl also has one sibling. Her mother is a policewoman. As a sailor man, her father is seldom at home so that Grace, her younger sister and her mother live with their grandmother and grandfather. They all speak Indonesian to communicate with Grace. She attends TK Dina Surabaya.

CHAPTER III

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA