

“WOW! ICE CREAM...!” ACQUIRING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE USING IMITATION AND REPETITION STRATEGIES

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Abstract

Learning English as a second language is not easy when non-native English children have to live within the native English speaking community, and they have no idea at all about the language except only for very few words. This study describes how three siblings from Indonesia, aged 6, 7 and 9, struggled with English when they first went to a primary school in Christchurch, New Zealand. The data were collected from the siblings' language achievement reports and the researcher's anecdotal records from her daily interaction with the siblings and the school's teachers. The result shows that the siblings were facilitated with ESL teachers, books and multimedia to support them develop their vocabulary repertoire. Imitating and repeating words and short sentences from teachers, peers, books, and multimedia are the strategies they preferred to apply while interacting in the school environment. This paper discusses the siblings' processes in acquiring the language during their seven months studying in that school. **Keywords:** School-Aged Kids, English as a Second Language, Language Development, Environment Supports

INTRODUCTION

Several studies have been conducted to investigate how young learners acquire English as a second language. Genesee (2016) investigated issues concerning children in North America whose home language is not English but went to a school where English is the language of instruction. Still, in the U.S., Espinosa (2007) studied non-native English pre-school children from 140 language groups living in the U.S and did not speak English, went to schools where English is used as the medium of instruction. However, it is hard to find studies on the use of imitation and repetition strategies applied by non-native English children during ongoing naturalistic interactions within the native English speaking community. This study intends to fill in the gap by exploring how three siblings from Indonesia; Rayyan (9 years old), Faris (7 years old) and Nisa (6 years old) made use of imitating and repeating strategies to interact with their teachers and peers when they first went to a primary school in Christchurch, New Zealand.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English as a Second Language

Teaching and learning English as a second language means that English is taught to non-native English students, but living in English community and have opportunities to learn English either in a formal or in an informal context (White, Watts & Trlin, 2002). These students treat English as their second language since English is a language they learned when they went to school, while at home they will use their mother tongue as their first language and have learned it since they were born. This

phenomenon can be found mostly in the U.S. (Bowers & Vasilyeva, 2011; Worthington et al. (2011), New Zealand (White, Watts & Trlin, 2002), Australia (Taufiq, 2016) and other countries where English is served as the first language.

Imitation Strategy

Imitation in this study as defined by Nielsen (2012) is "a process that involves the reproduction of an observed behavior using the same actions that were observed, with an understanding of the intentions behind the behavior." Imitation as a learning strategy can be divided into:

- a. Verbal imitation, by using words, and
- b. Non-verbal imitation, by using gestures, mimic, intonation, body language, and other kinds of expression which help to transfer the intended meaning.

Imitation claimed by Matti (2017) as a learner-centered strategy where the learner is given freedom by the teacher to be involved directly, such as when the teacher asks the student to say or do something like s/he did, or indirectly by assigning class activities where students need to do the task as the example given by the teacher. Further, Matti (2017) in her study found that children employ non-verbal imitation more than verbal imitation due to the nature of the task, which involves less verbal communication between the student and the teacher.

Repetition Strategy

Repetition comes after imitation. Wong argued that "Repetition forms a crucial resource by which children and adult learners of a second or foreign language gain increasing competence in the language of interaction. Language learners are exposed to and make use of repetition, in both the classroom and naturalistic contexts, as an acquisition processes of knowing and using the language of interaction come together and are separable" (2000, p. 408). By repeating words or sentences they hear in their environment, language learners improve their ability to use them while interacting in the community.

Tannen (2009) categorizes the functions of repetition as follows: production, comprehension, connection, and interaction. In the context of language learning, these mean that learners are able to repeat the words in an appropriate context, showing that s/he understood the meaning and able to use the words while interacting with others in the environment.

METHOD

This is a qualitative study where the researcher collected the data from her day-to-day anecdotal records from her interaction with the siblings as the subjects in this study and from her dialogues with the siblings' classroom and ESL teachers. The data collected were only those related to the application of imitating and repeating strategies. It is also the data consisted of the support given by teachers and peers and the use of multimedia and other sources of learning to help the siblings imitating and repeating words and sentences they listened around them. The data from the siblings' language achievement reports are also used in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part will be divided on how the siblings applied the imitating and repeating strategies from their day-to-day interaction with teachers and peers.

Imitating and Repeating Strategies while Interacting with Teachers

The first subject in this study, Rayyan (9), placed in year 5. Whenever his teacher needed to ask a question specifically addressed to him, the teacher would use Google translator. However, what mostly happened was that the instruction given by the teacher in the classroom was directed to the whole class and Rayyan would observe what his friends did, and he would follow them. This way, he applied the imitation strategy. There were also opportunities where his teacher would greet him in the morning and would say "Good morning, Rayyan," and she would ask Rayyan to give response by saying, "Say, good morning, Ms. Becker." This way, the teacher asked him to imitate her and repeat what she said.

Rayyan was also given special attention where the school provided an ESL teacher for him who would come to his class and regularly have time with him. She usually would ask Rayyan to read a storybook and correct any mispronunciations he made where Rayyan would imitate the way the teacher pronounced the words and repeat after her.

A similar situation also experienced by Faris (7) and Nisa (6) who were placed in the same classroom (year 2) to help them with the interaction process in the classroom. Every day, there would come an ESL teacher would read a book for them and with them, starting from level 1. Faris and Nisa would imitate the way the teacher pronounced the words and repeat reading the book in front of the teacher. Different from Rayyan who only asked to read a book at school, his two siblings needed to take back the same book they read at school and reread the book at home as homework. This time, one of their parents must listen to them reading the book and assist them where needed. This way, the school engaged the parents to be involved in the process of their kids learning English as the second language.

Having New Zealander teachers, the siblings imitated the New Zealanders' English from their teachers by pronouncing some words rather different with the majority of English dialect, such as when pronouncing the letter 'e' as its original sound when saying 'ten', the sound would be 'tin' and 'pen' would sound 'pin'. The same thing happened when pronouncing words ending with '-er,' such as 'helicopter,' they will say 'helicopta.'

Imitating and Repeating Strategies while Interacting with Peers

Other than his interaction with the teachers, Rayyan was facilitated with a peer to assist him in doing school work and playing in the school field from his first day studying in that school.

There were lots of benefits he got from interacting with his peers, such as Rayyan would imitate words during playing time, for example, when playing *Tag*, he would listen, imitate and repeat the words, "run!" and "catch him!" from his friends. In this case, he was not only repeated the words but also understood the meaning and knew how to act when saying the words by observing the attitude from his peers. This way, he successfully grasped new words from the natural context. The imitation processes

Rayyan experienced involved verbal imitation, by saying "run!" and "catch him!" and non-verbal imitation, by having correct intonation when saying the words, and able to use appropriate gestures, mimics, body languages and other expressions needed when screaming the words to his friend. Other than learning the correct words, Rayyan also learn slang words from his peers, such as "gotcha!" which comes from the word "(I) got you!"

Faris and Nisa were also facilitated with a peer assistant who assisted them in their first days at school. During the interaction process with their peers, Faris and Nisa would imitate, verbally and non-verbally, the way their friends say something. For example, Faris was impressed with the word "hexagon" and would repeat the word when he found any six-sided shape while Nisa loved to repeat saying, "Wow! Ice cream!", Every time she saw a picture of ice cream, or when her Mom bought her an ice cream. These siblings would repeat any new words by using correct pronunciation, intonation and by applying body language, which supported any words they say. Such as when Nisa annoyed by her younger brother at home, she would say, "it's not funny! Nisa would say this by glaring her eyes to him and at the same time pointing her index finger to her brother's face.

CONCLUSIONS

The three siblings in this study found to be able to apply to imitate and repeating strategies to interact with their teachers and peers. However, since they were only studied in that school for seven months, they were not yet able to produce grammatically correct sentence their own, such as instead of saying, "I have a stomachache," Rayyan would say, "I stomachache." Another example is when Nisa said, "I am happy birthday" when in fact what she meant was, "Today is my birthday."

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