From the Mouth of Babes*
A Pragmatic Analysis of
Children's Responses to Questions

Maria Corazon Aspeli-Castro

Acquiring language is one of our most amazing feats. By understanding language acquisition, we learn not only the complex processes of the mind, but also our behavior as we interact with others using language. Thus, understanding how language works is a concern that cuts across academic disciplines. As such, language studies lend themselves naturally to an interdisciplinary approach. As Halliday notes, "any language study involves some attention to other disciplines; one cannot draw a boundary round the subject and insulate it from others" (1978, p.11).

In the last fifty years, language acquisition has emerged as one of the most interesting and complicated areas of language study. Various disciplines, each focusing on certain aspects of language development, have taken language acquisition as a sub-field. For instance, psychologists explore language acquisition and development to understand human maturation; educators study the implications of language development on the acquisition and development of literacy skills. While linguists study language development to theorize about the nature of language, writers of children's literature try to learn more about the area in the hope of producing materials suitable to the general linguistic competence of their target readers—children.

Child language study dates from as far back as Herodotus who wrote about the first linguistic experiment conducted by an Egyptian king. St. Augustine, using his own experience and memory, wrote about the

process of first language acquisition. Initial studies on child language were done by social scientists (psychologists) who were interested in studying the development of man. The first attempt to record the linguistic development of a child was a collection of normative data on the development of children by the German biologist Tiedemann (1787). Years later, the study of child language had a founding father in Preyer (1882) who made notes throughout the first three years of his son's development. Other researchers followed and established a tradition of careful descriptive study of language acquisition (Campbell, 1975, pp. 3-5). Those who devoted their time writing *baby biographies* (Hoff, 2001, p.10) include Clara and William Stern (1929) and Leopold (1939). Leopold made a classic four-year study of the language development of his bilingual child. For the next thirty years, the interest in child language resulted in numerous and extensive studies providing linguists and psychologists new bases for understanding language processes and atypical language development.

Most of the studies, however, were descriptions of linguistic data. Researchers focused on certain aspects of phonology, morphology, and syntax to gather data on the size of children's vocabulary, the length of their utterance, or the sounds they make at different points in their development. In the 1960s, Chomsky revolutionized the study of language and created a new wave of research in language acquisition. Chomsky proposed a nativist view of language development, and those who followed his lead looked for evidence in children's utterances to support this view. They focused on linguistic rules children use to understand and produce language, and their work highlighted children's grammatical development (e.g., Brown 1964 and 1968). In the early 1970s, pragmatics reemerged as a research area due largely to the pioneering works on speech acts by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), and the work on conversational implicatures by Grice (1975). In sociology, Dell Hymes (1974) proposed an ethnographic framework that accounts for the various factors relevant to understanding how a particular communicative event achieves its goals. These works paved the way for studies that link language development to the broader functional and social dimensions of language use. Researchers shifted their focus from the formal aspect of child language to the interaction between child language and social context.

Motivated by the attention to and new interest in the integration of the social dimension in the study of child language, this study will examine language acquisition in terms of formal structures and language

use in context. It will address the question: What are the forms and functions of children's responses to questions addressed to them? This effort, however, entails breaking down this major query into more concrete questions designed to define its specific concerns. The nature and types of questions addressed to children will be investigated, as well as the forms in which they are expressed. Based on the analysis of their linguistic forms and more importantly, their contexts, this investigation will determine the major functions expressed in children's responses to questions addressed to them, as well as the forms and other textual devices they use to make the intent of their messages clear. Lastly, this study will analyze the social factors affecting their use of language and how they adapt their speech style to the social context (i.e. topic, setting, participant). The functions of language, the linguistic forms, the textual devices that interlocutors use to make their intentions clear, and the social context are the major factors that define the pragmatic and sociolinguistic concerns of this study.

Methodology

Research Paradigm

This study used both qualitative (observing, recording and interviewing the subjects in their natural environment) and quantitative methods (frequency counting) in analyzing children's language use. The children were observed in a naturalistic context to elicit spontaneous responses to questions addressed to them in various situations, as data may be difficult to generate in a controlled experimental setting.

Three children, two girls (LRA and LRN) and a boy (JJ), were chosen as subjects on the basis of their closeness to the researcher. The subjects had to be known to the researcher so that she could monitor and record the children's spontaneous interactions with other people with minimal constraints. The children's spontaneous use of language was observed, recorded, and transcribed.

The quantitative method (frequency counting) was used just to get an indication or an estimate of the frequency of a particular function, or features of children's utterances significant to the study. This study, however, is basically qualitative, and as such, it highlights a narrative and holistic description of the phenomena under study.

Methods of Recording

The conversations between the parent/s and the children were recorded on tape while notes were taken to provide additional data on the context of the utterance. The recordings were done at home—the place considered by the subjects as the most comfortable and familiar setting. Complementary methods such as observations and interviews were also conducted to help put the data in perspective. The conversations were recorded between 1992-1995 and ran for approximately 1,080 recording minutes. The three-year duration was suggested by Cartwright's observation that researchers can get more variety of situations, utterances, and behavior from longer periods of recording or observations (Bennet-Castor, 1988, p. 68). In addition, the large sample was necessary to reflect the different situations children find themselves in. A pragmatic analysis requires the inclusion of several contexts to allow the researcher to reach even tentative conclusions (Owens, 1996, p. 432).

The data collected were then labeled accordingly, and transcribed following the transcription pattern adapted from McTear (1985). The running transcription used included the written version of the children's and the interactant/s' utterances. Extra-linguistic information were enclosed in parentheses. Verbal productions of the children which could not be translated in written form were written using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

In summary, the methodology used in this research highlights (1) natural speech recorded in a naturalistic setting; (2) the analysis of the language use of three children instead of only one to account for individual differences; (3) the production and use of language instead of the emergence of particular grammatical elements. Linguistic analysis is also applied to help the researcher understand the pragmatic development of the subject.

Different Perspectives on Child Language Study

Over the last forty years, child language study basically followed two perspectives. One group moved toward a structurally-based orientation, the studies investigated the emergence of grammatical features. The other concentrated on semantic-pragmatic frameworks. The studies which followed these frameworks highlighted children's communicative intentions and the development of their communicative competence.

In the early 1970s, language studies veered away from a formal, context-independent system to a functional contextual perspective. As a result of this new direction in language studies, there was increased interest and demand for data derived from interactions in the natural environment (e.g. classroom, place of work, mother-child interactions). Child language study shifted its focus from the analysis of grammatical forms to the analysis of conversations between primary caregivers (usually the mother) and children. It is on the basis of this development in child language study that the data for this research were gathered and analyzed.

Role of Adult Input in Language Development

Due to the shift in focus from structural to functional analysis of interactions between primary caregivers and children, researchers began to take note of the role adults play in language learning. This move was in response to Chomsky's pronouncements that the language used by adults and heard by children is defective as previously pointed out—that is to say, adult language is a poor sample or model from which children can learn because it is full of false starts, grammatical errors and misleading pauses. Thus, children cannot learn language by simply listening to the language spoken around them.

Researchers also began studying child directed speech (CDS), likewise known as *motherese*. Studies have shown systematic differences between the language adults use when talking to adults, and that which they use when talking to children. Several common features are found in the language directed to children. CDS or motherese employs a number of special discourse features intended to involve the child in interaction and upgrade the child's own contribution to the interaction (Pine in Gallaway, 1994, p. 15). These features include frequent self-repetition and repetition of what the child says. CDS has higher pitch, slower tempo, more exaggerated intonation and clearer enunciation. It uses concrete nouns and words that are more closely tied to the immediate context of the child. It consists of short, well-formed utterances, few false starts, few complex sentences, and frequent questions. The CDS features have led researchers to argue that in simplifying their speech, mothers and other caretakers are presenting the child with lessons in language learning that may result in swift language development.

The Caregivers'/Mothers' Questions

One of the most noticeable features of adult-child discourse is a high frequency of questions. Holzman (1972) reported that 15% to 33% of mothers' utterances addressed to their children are questions. The result of Holzman's study is consistent with the findings of Nelson (1973) and Newport (1976) (cited in Bloom and Lahey, 1978, p. 280). Savic (1975) reported that mothers' questions could even reach 50% of the total utterances addressed to children.

There are a number of reasons for the high frequency of questions in mothers' utterances. Questions are more salient to children because they require answers. The frequent use of questions may also be associated with a particular kind of conversation-eliciting speech style which is conducive to rapid language learning. In terms of discourse, the frequency of questions in maternal speech can help train the child in conversational turn-taking—a very important pragmatic skill. Moreover, the use of questions which repeat or paraphrase the child's previous utterance may be seen as an attempt to upgrade the child's contribution to the discourse. In instances when the mother feels a lapse or gap in the conversation, questions provide a means to maintain an optimum level of stimulation to enable children to maintain contact.

The Nature of the Mothers' Questions

Before discussing the kinds of questions found in the data, some clarifications about the nature of questions must be made.

Baumert (1977, pp. 85-86) defines questions as verbal utterances which are directed towards verbal and non-verbal reactions. This definition excludes rhetorical questions or those answered by the speaker himself. Questions may be **wh** or **yes-no** questions. A wh-question involves a question word that specifies the kind of information needed. It has a **wh** word as the focus of the question. The question word may either be at the beginning or at the end, depending upon the degree of emphasis expressed by the utterance.

Ex: WHAT did mommy cook?
 Mommy cooked WHAT?

On the other hand, a yes-no question solicits negation or affirmation of the stated proposition. A yes-no question may be asked in several ways such as:

1. rising intonation at the end of the utterance (ex: Mommy is here?)
2. inversion of subject and verb (ex: Mommy is here—Is mommy here?)
3. use of do-support (ex: Do you want a balloon?)
4. tag question (ex: You are working on your assignment, aren't you?)

Questions may also be analyzed as illocutionary acts. Tsui (in Coulthard, 1992, pp.99-109) observes that aside from eliciting information, a question may also be interpreted as a request, directive, clarification, confirmation or agreement. De Villiers and De Villiers (1979, p. 64) have also noted that it is important not to neglect the function of questions in conversation, apart from their structure and meaning. Aside from finding missing information, questions are also actually used for a variety of purposes in discourse such as requesting, soliciting, etc.

Pine (in Gallaway and Richards, 1994, pp. 26-29) categorizes questions as **real, report,** and **verbal reflective.** Real questions are information-seeking questions to which the mother (questioner) does not know the answer. Report questions are prompt questions, the answers to which the mother is judged to know. Report questions include test questions which are used by mothers to demonstrate their children's linguistic or other knowledge (Berko-Gleason, 1997, p.487). Report questions are also those which request a particular action—that is to say, to make the child respond to a comment, to expand the structure, or to give added meaning. Verbal reflective questions repeat or paraphrase the child's previous utterance/s. This type of question is seen as the mother's attempt to clarify or modify the child's utterance/s.

Results and Analysis

An analysis of mothers' questions to children from the data collected yielded the following results:

Table 1

	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE
Utterances of mothers addressed to children	4,707	100%
Questions addressed to children	1,558	33%

The table above shows that more than 30% of the mothers' utterances were questions addressed to the children.

The result of this study is consistent with earlier findings that 15-33% of mothers' utterances addressed to their children are questions.

Table 2

Total No. of Questions: 1558

TYPE OF QUESTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Report	843	54%
Real	585	38%
Verbal reflective	86	6%
Undetermined	44	3%

Table 2 reveals that most of the questions that the mothers addressed to the children were report questions meant to test the children's linguistic and cognitive skills.

Report Questions

The preponderance of report questions may be explained by the fact that motherese has been observed to be basically didactic. Parents ask questions mainly to test children's comprehension, and to ensure that they stay focused and engaged in the conversation. The conscious effort on the part of the parents to monitor the feedback they receive during interaction will help them determine the children's maturation (linguistic and to some extent cognitive) and current level of linguistic skills. Although minimal research has been done to determine the specific correlation between cognition and communicative competence, recent studies suggest that some

aspects of communicative competence depend on cognition (Foster, 1990, pp 179-180).

One of the first things that mothers teach their children is the referential function of language which involves labeling entities that children experience physically and sensorily. This learning   process coincides with Piaget's sensorimotor period—a phase in development when children are observed to act on their environment. They reach out for things, grab, bite or hold any object in sight. Mothers usually take the opportunity to complement this stage of cognitive development by helping the children label the objects. As children go through this process, mothers test them through report questions as shown by the following examples:

Example 1

M: what did you see at the back of the house?
        you saw pigs
JJ: pigs
M: pigs
JJ: there *Ate* Vicky
M: what did *Ate* Vicky do huh?
JJ: huh?
M: use your microphone
JJ: pig,pig
M: yeah pig
        oh what else?
JJ: pig pig
M: what did the pig say?
JJ: (grunts)
M: what did the dog say?
JJ: /awaU /
M: and the cow?
JJ: / mu /
M: / mu /
        and the goat?
JJ: / m   /
M: / m /
        and the cat?
JJ: / miaU /
M: and the

JJ: dog
M: dog
JJ: /awaU /

Example 2

LRA: nam nam nam
        not nam nam nam
H :   what does the doggy say?
        Bow wow wow bow wow wow
LRN: (giggles)
H: Laraine finds it funny
LRN: du du du na no
H: what does the cow say?
        moo moo
LRN: he he he mi ya
H: cow that's a cow
LRN: bi bi
H: cock a doodle doo cock a doodle doo
LRN: badu badu

In example 1, the child just came back from the province where he saw different kinds of animals. The mother took the opportunity to check if the child remembered the names of the animals he saw in his grandfather's house. Apparently, he learned his lesson well for he was able to contrast the sounds made by the animals. In example 2, the animals were also differentiated by their sounds; only this time, the children were shown a picture book of animals. In both examples, the mothers are able to test their children's knowledge and awareness of the things found in the environment through the report questions. At the same time, the interactions proved to be instrumental in the children's learning to formulate semantic properties that distinguish one object/entity from another.

Clark (1983) hypothesized that children learn the "semantics" of their language by means of two principles—the principles of conventionality and contrast. As children experience language in various contexts, they also learn meaning and conventional labels from the people around them. These conventional labels are further refined by their own observations of how other people use particular words. In the examples given, the animals are contrasted by the sounds that they make. Other contrasting features include color, texture, smell, etc.

Real Questions

Aside from pedagogical purposes, the mothers' questions must be viewed as a genuine effort to communicate with children. The real questions allow a less adult-controlled conversation. For some children, this kind of interaction might be more challenging because it calls for greater production/performance on their part. A genuine call for comprehension on the part of the adult (e.g. what?, huh?, you have what?,) signals the child to adjust his speech in order to repair any impending breakdown in communication. Studies have shown that children are sensitive to the needs of their interlocutors and will adjust their speech accordingly (Corsaro, 1976). Adjusting their speech style may involve higher lexical production and longer structures.

Example 3

```
H:      what about Laraine
        who's with you in the chorus?
        who are the other members?
LRN:  Reggie Paul Ela Ela Nicole Gabby Kyla
        no Kyla's not  there ha
        it was
        I saw Felix yesterday
Felix was there in the program
LRA:   he's there at the back?
LRN:   u um you saw Emmanuel?
Manuel and Avia um Felice Felice Jake Paul Rogie Ericson
LRA:   Chester yes Chester
H:      what did you learn in school today
        what was your lesson?
LRA:   the lesson the lesson the lesson
        what mommy?
H:      what?
LRA:   lost your mittens you naughty kitten
        I was the storyteller
        I said the three little kittens they bow like that
        then I said again that three little kittens they
        lost their mittens and they began to cry
```

oh mother dear said the three little kittens
it was Jake and Felice and Paul

LRN: you said you're the kitten?
LRA: he was crying about the kitten yesterday
H: why?
LRA: but she was the three the three little kittens now
LRN: because I went out eh
Chester went out

Example 4

M: why?
No it's not
why was she absent?
JJ: because she forgot to go to school
M: maybe she's sick
JJ: coz she's sick
Sick and then *ano*
he just late
M: why?
JJ: why ano eh
M: *bakit?*
JJ: coz there's happening in the car
M: what happened to their car?
anong *nangyari?*
JJ: the gasoline's *baliktad*
M: *baliktad?*
JJ: yeah it's inverted
the gasoline the gasoline

In both examples, the mothers were genuinely requesting more information from the children who tried to provide them with what they believed were "adequate" information. In example 3, we find a child-dominated interaction where both children took turns in   asking and responding to each other's questions. The children's   questions to each other were actually meant to further qualify their previous responses to provide the mother with a better background of what happened in their school that day. In example 4, the child resorted to another strategy—translating--to explain better to his mother why a classmate was absent.

As the children mature, they take a more active part in the interactions; on the other hand, the mothers become more adept at using the children's responses to ask real questions and to listen more to the quality of the children's responses. The real questions gradually move away from an interaction dominated by adults to one where the children are able to practice soliciting, responding, and reacting.

Verbal Reflection Questions

In mother-child interactions, the mothers rely heavily on solicitation to get the children to take their turn. In most cases, the verbal repetitions or verbal reflection questions are meant to serve as contingent queries—requests for restatement, clarification or additional information on some unclear utterances of the children. Mothers use both non-specific queries (what?) and specific queries (what is lost?) as forms of request for clarification as shown in the examples below.

Example 5

LRN: you're not the chorus *ha?*
The three little kittens the three little kittens
lost their mittens
H: lost again?

In the preceding example, the verbal reflection question *lost again?* was the mother's way of showing surprise and of requesting the child to confirm what she just heard. In the next example, there could have been an early breakdown in communication were it not for the mother's verbal reflection questions.

Example 6

M: what's that huh?
JJ: I like the speaker mom
M: ouch!
JJ: (humming) it's the customer service
M: where did you get customer service?
          In Liana's?
JJ: it is talking

M: yah
JJ: there is no or there is?
M: what? (*non-specific*)
JJ: in the customer service of Liana's
M: what? *(non-specific)*
JJ: it is no or it has?
M: what does it have? *(specific)*
JJ: coffee
M: coffee?
JJ: talking
        talking in the customer service
        the aircon *lang*
M: huh?
JJ: . I like the aircon not the customer service
M: um (pauses)

The continuous queries of the mother served to signal to the child to make some adjustments in his speech to continue the conversation. He tried his best to repair the conversation by providing the mother with additional information *talking-talking in the customer service, the aircon—I like the aircon not the customer service.* Unfortunately, the mother could not decipher the child's meaning so she paused and consequently changed the topic.

In some cases the verbal repetitions are attempts to correct production errors without sounding negative. By repeating the part that is problematic (highlighted in Example 7), the mother guides the child in adjusting his speech where repair or corrections must be done.

Example 7

H: what else did she do?
        she made a new dress for Cinderella and then
Cinderella
        was able to go to the party remember?
LRN: / pababU /
H: she **bumped her head?**
LRN: *** (inaudible)
H: (laughs) what other stories do you know?
LRN: / bjutIpIp /
H: **beauty and the beast**

Early in the language development of the twins, LRA and LRN, it was observed that they exhibited minor atypical forms of the spoken language. In the example given, the mother used repetition to serve as model for the child LRN to take note of and to follow.

Wh-questions vs. Yes-No questions

The data also indicate that the mothers asked more wh- questions (1,207) than yes-no questions (351) as shown in the table below.

Table 3

Total No. of Questions: 1558

TYPE OF QUESTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Wh-question	1,207	77%
Yes-No question	351	23%

Among the wh-questions, the **what** questions occurred most frequently. The preponderance of the wh-questions is easily accounted for by the basic goal of motherese—that is, to activate the children's predisposition to learn language by presenting them with particular challenges provided by the various types of wh-questions. Unlike the yes-no questions, the wh-questions look for different kinds of information; thus, they are more demanding in terms of cognition and verbal production.

Table 4

Total No. of Wh-questions: 1207

TYPES OF WH-QUESTIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
What	790	65%
Who	168	14%
Where	102	8%
Why	82	7%
How	37	3%
Which	27	2%
When	1	.08%

The table above shows that the mothers asked more *what* questions which required the children to name, label or identify objects in the environment.

The incidence of *who* questions as second most frequent is consistent with the findings of studies on children's acquisition and comprehension of wh-questions. Wooten, Merkin, Hood and Bloom (1979) found that *what, where and who* are the first questions asked by children presumably because these are the first questions asked of them by their parents. Studies of children's comprehension likewise disclosed that the children find the said questions easier to respond to correctly because they do not require lengthy responses (Ervin-Tripp, 1970). Children are able to answer questions that require parts of sentences they can easily use or express. Young children's sentences reflect agents, objects and locations. We therefore find children able to answer *what, who and where* more readily than the other wh-questions (de Villiers and de Villiers, 1979, p.63). Furthermore, the focus of the questions is less semantically and cognitively complex compared to *how, when and why.* The concepts of manner, process, time, purpose and causality involve more coding time and more complex structures. It has been noted that in many instances where the children are asked *how, when or why,* they produce inappropriate answers. It is assumed that at this stage, the children may have yet to incorporate the questions in their speech and may not be ready in terms of their cognitive ability as borne out by the next example.

Example 9

JJ:	don't cook
M:	why?
JJ:	don't cook almond jelly and fruit cocktail
M:	why?
JJ:	wanna cook?
M:	why?
JJ:	wanna open it?
M:	what will you open?

In the example above, the child clearly did not understand the question *why* although he tried to offer possible answers based on his previous utterances. His counter questions to his mother's queries, however, suggested tentativeness on his part—an indication that he did not yet understand *why.*

Canonical and Non-canonical Responses

Using John Dore's pragmatic framework (1977), this study categorized the children's responses into canonical, non-canonical and no answer. Canonical responses are the simplest, most expected and grammatically-matched form responses. Non-canonical responses, on the other hand, are responses which provide relevant information although not standard or grammatically-matched form responses. No answer means no response, verbal or otherwise, on the part of the child.

An examination of the responses of children to various types of questions addressed to them by their interlocutors (primarily their mothers) yielded the following results.

Table 5

Total No. of Responses: 1207

TYPES OF RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Canonical	681	56%
Non-canonical	508	42%
Undetermined/no answer	18	1%

The preceding table shows that children gave more canonical (56%) than non-canonical responses to wh-questions. It shows that more than half of the responses were canonical—that is to say, the responses were expected and grammatically matched. Many of the questions also began with *what, who and where*—wh-questions that are first acquired by children. In general, children are more successful in giving appropriate and accurate responses when the questions refer to objects, persons and events in the immediate environment (Owens, 1996, p. 325). In the data gathered, the mothers' questions simply required naming or labeling objects and identifying people. As noted earlier, the referential function of language (which involves labeling entities) is one of the first things mothers teach their children, so it is not surprising that they gave more canonical answers to questions that require such type of information. The data show, however, that the children also gave more canonical answers even to questions that refer to locative information.

In general, the children in this study gave more canonical responses (56%) than non-canonical responses (42%). Many of these canonical responses were actually the result of the different interactive strategies both the mothers and children used. These strategies include preformulating and reformulating questions (French and McLure, 1981).

Preformulating questions is a strategy used by mothers to preface or introduce the question they want their children to answer. It orients the children to the more important part of the conversation or to the part the adult would like to focus on. The next set of examples illustrate how the mothers preformulate their questions to subtly signal the kind of response they expect from the children:

Example 10

M: yah
        you remember the characters in Sesame Street in the
        viewmaster?
JJ: yah
M: **they have their individual letters like who's**
        that holding the umbrella?
        Bert or Ernie?
JJ: in the viewmaster?
M: yah
JJ: what's inside the video?
M: ah film
JJ: film
M: uhum
JJ: viewmaster
M: yah
JJ: **that's letter W**

Example 11

H: May
        what day is it today, honey?
        May 16, 1993
9:00 in the evening
        my first book of sounds
        what does the kitten say?

	miao miao
LRA:	nam nam nam
H:	not nam nam nam
	miao
	what does the doggy say?
	Bow wow wow bow wow wow
LRN:	(giggles)
H:	Laraine finds it funny
LRN:	du du du na no
H:	**what does the cow say?**
	moo moo
LRN:	he he he mi ya
H:	cow that's a cow
	What does the rooster say?
LRN:	bi bi
H:	cock a doodle doo cock a doodle doo
LRN:	badu badu badu

In example 10, the mother and the child were talking about the letters of the alphabet. Apparently, the child had some difficulty recalling certain letters so the mother resorted to giving additional information (shown by the highlighted parts of the exchange) that would help the child recall or orient him to the focus of the mother's question (the letter W). In the next example, the mother set the tone in so far as the kind of information she wanted. She announced that she had the children's book of sounds and actually made the sounds of the different animals. It took some time though before the child LRN was able to give the expected answer.

Despite the various interactive strategies the mothers used, the results show that children still gave non-canonical responses. The non-canonical responses include giving different answers, performing an action or asking a question. The category *different answers* refers to responses that are unrelated to the topic or do not correspond to the information being asked. Some questions were interpreted as requests for action, so the children complied by simply performing some actions. There were also questions to which children responded by asking counter-questions or by repeating previous utterances of the mother. It is possible that children's questions and repetitions functioned either as contingent queries or as reaffirmation of the mothers' previous utterances.

The succeeding tables show that majority of the non-canonical responses were irrelevant or *what seemed to be irrelevant* answers. The children gave unrelated or different answers. Some *what* and *how* questions were understood by children as request for actions; hence, they responded by doing some action. A number of the non-canonical responses were also contingent queries meant to clarify or confirm the preceding utterances of the adults.

Table 6

Total number of non-canonical responses (*to What questions*): 342

TYPE OF NON- CANONICAL RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Different answer	180	52%
Action	70	20%
Question	33	9.6%
Repetition	18	5.3%

Table 7

Total number of non-canonical responses (*to Who questions*): 35

TYPE OF NON-CANONICAL RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Different answer	23	66%
Action	0	
Question	12	34%
Repetition	0	

Table 8

Total number of non-canonical responses (*to Which questions*): 9

TYPE OF NON-CANONICAL RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Different Answer	5	56%
Action	4	44%
Question	0	
Repetition	0	

Table 9

Total number of non-canonical responses (*to Where questions*): 40

TYPE OF NON-CANONICAL RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Different Answer	32	80%
Action	0	
Question	7	18%
Repetition	1	2%

Table 10

Total number of non-canonical responses (*to Why questions*): 57

TYPE OF NON-CANONICAL RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Different answer	49	86%
Action	0	
Question	6	11%
Repetition	2	3%

Table 11

Total number of non-canonical responses (*to How questions*): 25

TYPE OF NON-CANONICAL RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Different answer	15	60%
Action	7	28%
Question	2	8%
Repetition	1	4%

Of the wh-questions, *why* elicited the most number of unrelated or different answers (86%). This finding supports the observation that being one of the last wh-questions to be acquired by children, *why* remains one of the most difficult questions to respond to. This may be due to the fact that children are required to examine causal relationships and to reason when responding to *why*. Unlike *what, who* and *where* which are question words for basic sentence roles and which can be answered by one or two words, *why* often requires more explanation and more elaborate sentence structure.

It is not clear whether or not the children understand the meaning of *why*. Their unrelated answers are probably comments on some familiar words or phrases within the adult utterance and not really responses to *why*. What is amazing is the fact that children still try to respond albeit inappropriately. It is assumed that in their desire to maintain the conversation, children use an answering mechanism that combines linguistic (formal) and semantic strategies. In the example below, the child responded 'yeah' to the question *why did you cry?* This response shows that the child responded on the basis of the subject 'you' and the verb 'cry.' The child did not recognize *why* and what was salient to him was the subject 'you' which he related to *who* and the verb 'cry' which he associated with the action of 'you.' He saw the question, therefore, as similar to the yes-no question, *You cry?* Hence, he responded with 'yeah.'

Example 12

M: why did you cry?
        what did daddy say?
JJ: yeah
M: what did daddy say?
JJ: downstairs
M: yeah daddy is downstairs

Actually, the mother tried to help the child by asking *what did daddy say?* (The father said something to the child which made him cry.) Apparently, the child became all the more confused, so he gave another non-canonical answer, 'downstairs,' this time to a *what* question.

Several questions were also interpreted by the children as requests for action, and they responded by performing the perceived requests. Research shows that children under three years old do not really distinguish between literal and conveyed or implied meaning. Shatz (1978) observed that young children cannot distinguish between questions that are requests for information and those that are directive. Some of them simply employ a strategy of responding with action to adult utterances as shown in the following examples.

Example 13

M: where's the plastic cover?
JJ: (looks for the plastic cover)

There are, however, instances when the mother's questions are actually implicit directives and the children's responses (action) although non-canonical are considered appropriate. In such situations, one is likely to observe that the children's sensitivity to the conveyed meaning is affected by the context, the children's previous experiences and the interlocutors' (mothers') behavior. Fernald (1989) has shown that mothers mark their intonation in speech to children more clearly than in their speech to adults.

Yes–No questions

The results of the analysis of yes-no questions are the following:

Table 12

Total number of responses: 351

TYPE OF RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Canonical	135	38%
Non-canonical	200	57%
Unintelligible	16	4%

The table above reveals that the children gave more non- canonical responses (57%) to yes-no questions.

Table 13

Total number of canonical responses: 135

TYPE OF RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Intonation only	75	56%
Yes-No response	34	25%
Do-support	25	1.7%
Request action	1	.7%

Table 14

Total number of non-canonical responses: 200

TYPE OR RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes-no response	36	18%
Intonation only	124	62%
Do-support	32	16%
Request action	8	4%

The preceding tables disclose that despite the fact that the rising intonation (without subject-verb inversion) remains the preferred yes-no question form, the children still gave more non-canonical responses (62%).

The data show that yes-no questions yielded more non- canonical than canonical responses. Yes-no questions were expressed by the mothers using subject-verb inversion, rising intonation without inversion, do- support, and request for action forms.

That the mothers used more questions involving the rising intonation without inversion was also disclosed by the data. The rising intonation proved a convenient form for yes-no questions even if the children might have been aware of the subject-verb inversion. Research shows that adults rarely use syntactic inversion in informal speech. Behnstedt (1973) estimated that 90% of the questions asked by adults are intonation only questions.

The non-canonical responses in this study are categorized as follows:

Table 15

TYPE OF NON-CANONICAL RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
Qualification	31%
Unrelated responses	23%
Repetition	20%
Query	8%
Wh-questions	6.5%
Tagalog	6%
Compliance	3.5%
No response	2.5%

The preceding table shows that most of the non-canonical responses (31%) were requests for qualification or clarification.

Non-canonical responses which are categorized as qualification are responses whose structure is a modification or an expansion of the adult's previous utterance. Unrelated responses refer to those which seem to have no connection or relevance to the topic or to the question asked. Repeti-tive responses are those which are repetitions of parts or of the entire utter-ance of the adult. A query is a response that is also a question, while a wh-question response is appropriate to a wh-question but not a yes-no ques-

tion. The children were also observed to respond in Tagalog or in terms of non-verbal behavior. There were also moments when the mothers did not get any verbal or physical response from the children.

Forms of Children's Responses

The children's responses may be classified into the following categories:

1. completion form or fill-in
2. elliptical/ reduced form
3. mixed form
4. complete form

Completion Form or Fill-in

During the earlier part of the recording, the mothers used sentence completion to elicit responses from the children. The mothers simply said the beginning of the sentence and left it unfinished for the children to complete. Through the rising intonation that is associated with the question form, the mothers signaled to their children that they were requesting information. The effect of this type of elicitation is similar to that of the wh-questions because the blanks to be filled correspond mainly to the *what* and *who* questions. Owens (1996, p. 223) calls this type of response *fill-ins*.

Example 15

M: now, what's this? (points to a picture)
JJ: boy
M: a boy and a ?
JJ: girl

In the example above, the mother elicited information which basically required naming or identifying objects in the immediate physical environment. At around age two, children are believed to be busy building their vocabulary, an activity that is reinforced by this type of questioning strategy. However, one may observe that the exchange went beyond the referential function of language. When the mother pointed to the picture, she was also testing the ability of the child to distinguish the difference in

gender and in features. The child, by comparing the features of the boy and the girl in the picture, was able to answer correctly. The mother helped expand the child's ability by deliberately leaving her sentence unfinished and thereby also encouraging the child to think. This questioning strategy aids in the early attainment of meaning and relation as the child is led to find and recognize differences in human features and the properties of objects.

Elliptical or Reduced Form

There are two kinds of reduced structures found in children's utterances. The first kind resembles what is described in early children's sentences as telegraphic speech. In telegraphic speech, the children leave out closed-class words so that their utterances are similar to a telegram as illustrated by the examples below.

Example 16

H: *o* what did she say?
        Cinderella
LRN: sindelela sus sus (Cinderella shoes shoes)
H: give me my shoes

Example 17

H: what else did she do?
        She made a new dress for Cinderella and
        then Cinderella was able to go to the party,
        remember?
LRN: bam he (bump head)
H: she bumped her head

The other type of reduced form—the grammatical ellipsis— reflects the child's linguistic sophistication. In this kind of structure, the child is assumed to be aware of the listener's presupposition. She/he takes into account prior linguistic references and omits the elements that are redundant. Unlike in the telegraphic speech, however, the deleted structures in the grammatical ellipsis have either been already acquired by the child or in the process of being learned (Bloom, 1991). Bloom's study reveals that before a child learns the rules for the grammatical ellipsis, she/

he must have learned the rules for producing the complete form.

Example 18

M: OK what do we have here?
         I like this one
JJ: **this is my favorite**
M: ah this one is your favorite?
JJ: **yeah**

The example above shows that the child was aware of the complete form of the reduced sentence; however, he did not have to repeat for stylistic purposes. Repeating would have made the exchange sound unnatural, too formal, and awkward.

Mixed Forms

As expected, the children's exposure to media and other people in the environment resulted in occasional switches to Filipino. The children switched from English to Filipino when they wanted to get the attention of their interlocutor or when they wanted to express strong emotion. When they heard a Filipino word that was new to them, they tried to repeat it and use it in a sentence. Such behavior is actually validated by Weinrich (1953) and Gumperz (1970) who noted that bilinguals occasionally make use of separate codes for the sake of enriching their language and for some other purposes. The next group of children's responses consisted of code-switchings—that is to say, predominantly English utterances interspersed with Filipino words.

The switchings found in the data are of three kinds. The first is extrasentential which consists of grammatical fillers such as *ha, nga, naman, eh* inserted in otherwise English utterances. Since these forms are subject to minimal syntactic constraints, they are easily inserted at various places in the sentences.

Example 19

H: **ah** you didn't want to say meow meow like that?
LRN: **eh** because I might get cry baby

The next kind of switching is intrasentential. This occurs when elements of language X are mixed with those of language Y within a sentence or clause.

Example 20

M: coz you're always touching this one eh
JJ: where is it **na**?
mama Cora threw it **na** in the **basura**

Intersentential switching which refers to changes that take place at the end of the sentence is also found in the data.

Example 21

M: you broke it **ano**?
JJ: no I did not **ah**
M: you broke it
JJ: I did not
ganyan talaga   .

In the preceding exchange, the child switched to Filipino to reiterate the fact that he was not guilty. Because the mother insisted that the child did something, the latter shifted to Filipino after repeating his denial in English (I did not) to catch his mother's attention and to assert his innocence.

In other instances, the child JJ used Filipino to respond to questions in English.

Example 22

M: what did you eat for lunch?
JJ: *kanin*
M: rice
JJ: *kanin*
M: did you eat rice
JJ: *kanin*
M: what else?
JJ: *kanin nga*

   kanin nga
M: I told you when mommy is here speak?
JJ: English

In the example above, the child was going against the   linguistic norm at home—that is, to speak English. The mother coaxed him to say in English what he had for lunch, but his attention seemed to focus on exhausting his mother's tolerance toward his use of Filipino. The child was apparently irritated by the mother's repetition, so he continued to respond in Filipino. Sensing a change in behavior, the mother changed her tone and reminded the child of the language rule at home. Her question was meant to establish position and authority which the child recognized; hence, he went back to speaking English.

The child JJ would occasionally use code-switching for practice. During "relaxed" moments when even the mother occasionally switched to Filipino, he would try to use the language as much as possible. However, due to his inadequate linguistic competence in Filipino, he would produce rather amusing constructions as the following dialogue between mother and son demonstrates.

Example 23

M: what else do you know?
JJ: *alam*
M: *di mo maintindihan Tagalog?*
JJ: *hindi*
M: *bakit?*
JJ: *kasi gumagalit yung daddy ko eh*
M: *bakit gumagalit?*
JJ: *kasi hindi hindi ako* adult *eh*
M: *anong* adult?
JJ: *malaking* kids adult
M: ah
   eh bakit kung hindi ka malaking kid *ba't siya gumagalit?*
JJ: *kasi*
M: um
JJ: *kasi nagtatagalog ako eh*
M: *ah nagagalit siya?*

JJ: um um
M: *bakit siya nagagalit?*
JJ: *kasi nagtatagalog ako eh*
M: *eh ang* mommy *mo nagagalit?*
JJ: *hindi*
M: *bakit*
JJ: *kasi* teacher *siya ng* English
M: um
  di siya nagagalit pag nagtatagalog ka?
JJ: *hindi si* daddy *lang*
M: *si* daddy *lang*
  ba't nagagalit si daddy?
JJ: *kasi nagtatagalog ako eh*
M: *ah ayaw niya?*
JJ: *ayaw*
M: *pero sa* school what do you use?
  Tagalog or English?
JJ: um Chinese

  To understand the conversation, several things must be noted. First, English is the dominant language at home and monolingual (Filipino) utterances are discouraged. Second, it is the mother and not the father who is more insistent on his not using Filipino. Third, English and not Chinese is the language used in school. In the exchanges above, there is clearly a violation of the maxim of quality. The child insisted that it was the father and not the mother who was more concerned on what language to use. When asked if the mother was strict, he said no and ironically stated that the mother did not get mad because she is a teacher of English. Apparently, he used this strategy to test how far the mother would allow the language shift. As expected, the mother showed alarm at the rate the child was speaking Filipino, so she immediately asked about the language used in school. She also quickly switched to English as if to set a more serious tone. However, the child was not about to give up his language play. When asked if English or Filipino was used in school, the child said *Chinese* matter-of-factly as if to tell the mother not to get so anxious about his language shift.

Complete Forms

As expected, the children's complete sentences occurred when the

recording was about to end. By this time, the children had started preschool. LRA and LRN, who initially spoke unintelligibly, had gradually been able to approximate the adult language system. The children's complete sentences manifested their slowly developing knowledge of language formal rules, growing vocabulary and awareness of new objects and experiences. Furthermore, the children's growing knowledge of relationships had to be accommodated by their expanding syntax. Many of their complete or almost complete sentences were meant to modify a preceding utterance for the purpose of clarifying or giving more information. However, their elaborate sentences still disclosed missing elements such as articles, grammatical morphemes such as the –ed past, -s plural, and connectors.

Example 24

M:	aha this is what?
JJ:	an old woman
M:	aha yeah
JJ:	Jack eating a lot of fruit
	Jack eating the hand
M:	with the hands

Example 25

H:	um Jesus said that?
LRA:	um um
H:	who told you?
LRA:	*lola*
H:	ah
LRA:	said water be dry so you have to pray coz on earth they will not be alive the animals and the water will dry
H:	what can you do so God won't be on strike
LRA:	pray for God so that he will not go in strike If you don't if you don't Start to love and pray...

While the preceding discussion yielded regularities in syntactic forms, this study, being pragmatic in nature, highlights the language use of the subjects and the social factors that affect their language use. The gram-

matical forms were noted as they relate to the expression of the children's intention in various speech situations.

Functions of Children's Responses

An analysis of the children's utterances revealed the following data:

FUNCTION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Representational	1,059 67.1%	
Expressive	197	12.5%
Social	143	9%
Tutorial	133	8.4%
Control	46	2.9%

The table shows that many of the responses served the representational function of language.

The frequency of the representational function may be explained by the tasks mothers and children engaged in. The mothers tended to employ an informational style of questioning that centered on naming objects and assessing the children's cognitive development. As the mothers became more curious about the linguistic and cognitive developments of their children, they became more inclined to ask WHAT questions which are associated with the information function. Further, as the children became more concerned with activities that allowed them to explore the environment, the mothers tended to increase their use of information-oriented questions. This information-centered exchange encouraged the children to overcome their conversational limitations and perform as expected or even more, by giving additional or new information.

From this type of interaction, the children learned more nouns to name objects and more adjectives to describe themselves and other people, as well as the events and other processes they observed around them. Through the extensions and expansions modeled by their mothers, the children learned to qualify their utterances. Consequently, the increased vocabulary and grammatical knowledge enabled them to express more successfully and appropriately a wider range of intentions.

The data also revealed that the children improved their ability to sustain a conversation by asking questions about their interlocutor's comments. The children often responded to the mothers' queries by asking another question—whether to clarify or to introduce new ideas to the conversation. This development seemed to have anticipated the more demanding and challenging question-answer structure that parents and children engaged in later. The conversational exchanges no longer consisted of questions from the adults and responses from the children. The children took on the more mature role of interlocutors. If they felt that the adults lacked knowledge, or if the conversation was on the verge of breaking down, they turned into competent communicators by adapting their language to the needs of their partners. They provided more elaborations that included expanded sentences, new lexical items and other forms of qualifiers, and counter-questions.

All these responses would seem to reflect the children's growing interest in their social world as well as their increasing experiences. In a way, the children's expanding social and cognitive awareness complemented their verbal maturity. As they produced more elaborate structures, they also gained the opportunity to experiment with different question forms such as *how* and *why* with which they initially had problems comprehending.

The interactions between the mothers and the children also highlight the creativity of the children in "inventing" new words and their own versions of traditional children's stories. As parents, we have told stories to our children to entertain them and to help them develop their linguistic and literacy skills. During storytelling time, we provide them with language models that can stimulate the development of more complex structures and the use of deixis.

When asked to narrate a story, the children in this study were actually challenged to use their existing communication skills and to acquire new skills to help them meet the task of narrating effectively. These new skills included cultivating their own narrative style, expressions, and gestures. In addition, they used the phonological resources of language to reinforce the setting and the characters of their stories as exhibited by the next example.

Example 27

H: this is the story of *Ate* Laura
        ok you may start
        what's this?

LRA: one day Laraine was in the house and found a big
        And she found a big big snowman
        After then she found first a bear and she found
        A big big snowman And then wanna give him a gift
        he has no jacket and the dog gave him a jacket
        named Timba
        then a it's not yet rewind

H: it's recording your story
        continue

LRA: and one day the bad a bad
        three pockets there then bad dog said also
        I like a bad baby
        also a bad baby like you and this is the ne
        this is the letters of the bad little girl
        they left the teddy bears uptairs
        and the clock was striking BONG'
        it was 12:00 and then that's the end of the
        story

The child's creativity and imagination is reflected by the fact that her story was actually a combination of many children's stories such as the *Lion King, Goldilocks and the Three Bears,* and *Cinderella.* The child borrowed the characters (Timba, bears, little girl) and the setting (12:00) of the various stories as she created her own. Moreover, she used onomato-poeia (BONG) and alliteration (bad baby) to emphasize important features of her story while at the same time acting out some roles.

The tutorial function takes the form of drills that repeat newly introduced words or articulate the initial sounds of particular words. This function helps the children to recall names, events, things and numbers as illustrated in the exchange below.

Example 28

S: (dad) say dog
LRA: dog

S: say cat
LRA: cat
H: horse
LRA: hoy tik tik
H: horse

The preceding discussions have shown that children respond to questions in a variety of forms and functions. Using linguistic resources, albeit initially limited, children inform, object, criticize, assert, question, clarify or even challenge their partners' previous utterances. We find them moving from one functional mode to another in their effort to maintain their contact with their interlocutors.

The analysis of the interactions between the mothers and their children foregrounded the following issues regarding the development of the children's communicative competence.

Conclusion

The Mothers' Interactive Strategies

It is evident that the mothers play an important role in the development of the children's communicative competence. The mothers' linguistic behavior serves as a model from which the children acquire most of their vocabulary. The children's ability to use referential language is assumed to have developed from their mothers' practice of labeling things in their environment. This practice is followed by questioning in which the questions asked are still directed toward the referential function of language. The wh-questions the mothers address to their children solicit information that require the children to name and to describe places, people, and other objects in the environment.

In this study, the mothers definitely used a lot of repetition to call the children's attention to some linguistic or social behavior. Brown and Bellugi-Klima (1964) have demonstrated that 30% of mothers' utterances to young children consist of repetition with expansion. Although there are problems regarding the specific role of expansion in language acquisition, many linguists generally believe that repetition coupled with expansion make it easier for children to learn words, word categories and their combinations. The mothers' use of expansion increases the children's chance to

cope with the demands of interactions, and consequently, enables them to give relevant and appropriate responses to their mothers' questions. Their questioning techniques allow the children to observe turn- taking, perspective taking, and conversation management, such as topic initiation, maintenance, and repair, which are important aspects of the children's developing pragmatic competence.

In addition, the mothers' use of prosodic features and other nonlinguistic behavior like pointing, eye contact, nodding and shaking of the head helped the children understand their intentions. Consequently, the children were able to formulate expected responses most of the time.

The Children's Conversational Strategies

The children in this study were intelligent interlocutors whose skills in conversation must not be underestimated. Indeed, they had linguistic constraints because of their age but they responded quite well to their interlocutors and engaged in short exhanges on a given topic. Their communication skills must have developed from the training and exposure made possible by their interactions with their mothers and other members of the family. While some aspects of linguistic knowledge may be innate, this investigation reaffirms that communicative competence develops in a supportive environment. The children in this study exhibited various communication strategies that enabled them to convey meanings to their interlocutors. These strategies included repetition, the use of a different register, the use of prosodic features, and the use of deixis.

1. Use of Repetition

The children used repetition as contingent queries or requests for clarification. The study of Faerch and Kasper (cited in Blum-Kulka and Kasper) indicates that the most widely used indirect request strategy is the query. Many of the requests made by children are in the form of contingent queries where the *requested act* or the intention of the children are grounded on and recognized by the   listener on the basis of some prosodic features (rising intonation, stress, etc.) and formal modifications such as the repetition of previous utterances.

Sometimes, the children repeat an utterance or part of the preceding utterance of the adult to establish joint reference. Because of their

limited attention span and memory, repetition also serves as a cohesive device that would relate the adults' and the children's utterances.

2. Use of a Different Register

The results of this investigation reaffirm the findings of earlier studies which established the ability of children to adapt or fine-tune their speech to the context (participants, situation, topic) and their intentions. Although not as adept in communicating as their mothers, the children in this study were, nonetheless, able to make systematic modifications in their speech when they faced a different conversational situation or wished to convey messages they would not explicitly state.

For instance, to show a strong feeling (rejection, irritation or aversion to something), the child JJ code-switched to Filipino. He was aware that by using Filipino, he would surely get the attention of his mother and suggest how he felt toward the topic, the mother's behavior, or an occurrence or object in the immediate environment.

The children also code-switched if they sensed that the mothers were in a relaxed mood and would not reprimand them for their language mixing. Most of the time, they patterned their linguistic behavior after their mothers' for the mothers also occasionally code-switched.

Since the children were not really proficient in Filipino, the children's mixed codes sometimes resulted in humorous exchanges. During these moments, code-switching served as a source of entertainment for the participants.

In situations, however, when language use was primarily didactive, or when the mothers were asking test questions, the children, especially JJ, became more conscious of his code. He knew that any language shift (except in cases where Filipino is used for metalinguistic purposes) would elicit a reprimand from his mother.

Aside from code-switching, the children also changed their register when they sensed that their interlocutors were truly communicating with them and not merely testing their cognitive skills. If they sensed that their partners did not really know the information they were asking for, the children took up the challenge of dealing with a less knowledgeable inter-

locutor. This resulted in the children's being able to produce more elaborate structures, more lexical items, and more repetition even without prodding. Often they complimented their verbal production with paralinguistic features (nodding, pointing, acting, etc.) for emphasis.

3. Use of Prosodic Features

As early as the prelinguistic stage (before the children are able to utter "adult" words), children use the prosodic features (stress, intonation, pitch, pauses) of language to convey their biological needs. In this study, the rising intonation was primarily used by the children to convey doubt, request new information, express surprise, request confirmation, and express confusion. At times, they used the rising intonation to get the attention of their mothers—a linguistic behavior they actually observed in their own mothers. Such use may have been due to the fact that the rising intonation is generally more open to interactions, and was used by the mothers to coax the children to be more active in their interactions.

The recorded data also revealed that during storytelling, the children used the rising intonation between boundaries of utterances to indicate the continuation of their stories. The message conveyed was for adults not to interrupt and to wait for the falling intonation before asking a question or making a comment.

4. Use of deixis

The children used deictic elements (pronoun, demonstratives, locative verbs), and gestural support (pointing, eye contact) to direct the attention of the mother. The use of gestures to accompany deictic elements was evident during the early phase of the recording. Later, the children learned to use simple deictics—I, she, my, your, this, there, here, that—without the aid of gestures. Though the children were occasionally confused by shifting references, their mothers were quick to detect and correct errors in referencing.

Understanding Non-Canonical Responses

How do we analyze and understand the chilren's non- canonical responses and put them in proper perspectives?

Grice defined communication as the process of discovering intentions between speakers and listeners. Engaging in a communicative act entails knowledge of various forms of skills and strategies that enable the participants to make choices representing their intentions. It is not enough for children to acquire linguistic knowledge. They must have an understanding of discourse conventions (turn-taking, topic maintenance, perspective taking, etc.) and a knowledge of the social situation (participant role, conventions, topic, setting, etc.) to be able to convey their intentions appropriately, as well as to interpret those of others successfully.

While the interpretation of an utterance is guided and aided by the context, the speakers also have certain assumptions and preconceived notions. Grice points out that participants follow maxims (quality, quantity, relevance and manner) when engaging in discourse.

The mothers in the study were observed to utilize linguistic and contextual resources to convey their intentions to their children as well as to elicit canonical responses from children. In many instances, the children provided the expected responses, thereby reaffirming the notion that participants do observe certain principles that allow them to decode and encode messages appropriate to the context. However, the children also gave a number of non-canonical responses that seemed irrelevant to the topic and the situation. While the reason for some irrelevant answers could be inferred from the children's linguistic and cognitive inadequacies, other irrelevant answers were repetitive, deliberate and sometimes figurative, all of which would prompt the listener to think that the children's utterances are actually beliefs, motives/intentions indirectly conveyed. For instance, when the mother asked the child LRN why she was transferred to the chorus, she elicited a long and elaborate response from the child. At first, the child's response seemed to violate the maxim of quantity for she included the situations of her other classmates who also took part in the play. However, on closer examination, the child was trying to tell the mother (by including the situations of her other classmates) how difficult it was to be a major character and was justifying her decision to be transferred to the chorus. At times, children also violated the maxim of relevance to evade the mothers' interrogation, as though to signal to them to please change the topic. Giving an irrelevant answer seemed to be the children's way of avoiding things they did not like to discuss or do. A child who gives unrelated or irrelevant responses is thus not to be automatically branded an incompetent or uncooperative interlocutor. On the contrary, to deliber-

ately violate the maxims or to hint about an intention requires skills on the part of the speaker. Hence, an irrelevant or what seems to be an irrelevant response from a child should not be disregarded. It could be an indication of a more salient aspect of the discourse.

The investigation of the children's responses to questions addressed to them revealed that the study of language development and communicative competence can be better understood if both the children's communicative strategies and the mothers' teaching techniques are evaluated. Language learning is a process that involves the children accumulating knowledge of the underlying principles of their language and using strategies to help them understand and use the language to which they are exposed. In addition, the mothers aid the language learning process by presenting modified speech aimed at reinforcing the linguistic as well as the conversational skills of the children.

In general, we cannot disregard the significant role of adult input in the development of a child's communicative competence. Adult-child interactions expose the child to a wide range of linguistic forms and contexts in which these forms can appropriately be used. Indeed, to be linguistically competent is not enough. Much of what happens in communication depends on pragmatic knowledge which integrates linguistic, cognitive, and social knowledge and conversational skills.

Theoretical Implications

This research reaffirms that language acquisition cannot be divorced from the social context of meaning and intention. The essence of communication cannot be derived solely from linguistic structures but also from the interplay of forms and factors in the environment. Due to their limitation in knowledge and experience, children need as much exposure and training from others to discern meaning and consequently express their own intentions clearly and appropriately. The observations regarding the mothers' behavior during interactions reflect ways in which adults help children overcome their limitations as conversational partners.

This study reinforces the finding that negotiated interaction (one in which the mother deliberately engages the child in conversational interactions by employing different methods of elicitation) does have an effect on the communicative development of children. Through interactions,

children develop pragmatic skills such as knowing how to answer questions, being able to participate in conversations by observing turns as well as changes in perspective, noticing and responding to non-verbal features of the interaction, being able to initiate, maintain and close conversations, observing the conversational principles, etc.

Recommendations

Although Child Language Research (CLR) is flourishing in other parts of the world, it has yet to gain the interest and support of our researchers in the Philippines. This investigator finds this situation unfortunate. CLR in general may be used in concretizing or illustrating communication and usage principles discussed in our language courses as well as some courses in Speech Communication, Sociolinguistics, Developmental Psychology and Pedagogy. Data generated from these studies can provide authentic examples for related areas of study.

To date, this is the first study on child language with a pragmatic orientation in the University. As such, it tried to cover as many pragmatic elements yielded by the data. Much remains to be done, however. Researchers interested in focusing on specific pragmatic skills of children can set their own parameters.

There are many potentially feasible research activities future scholars may wish to pursue. To cite a few:

1. Investigate prelinguistic conversations between mothers and children which are believed to be the bases of children's initial exposure to turn-taking and other pragmatic skills;
2. Study requests and apologies manifested in conversations between adults and children or between children;
3. Discover variations in the speech styles of fathers and mothers when talking to children;
4. Determine changes in the speech styles of children when talking to adults and peers;
5. Study other pragmatic uses of code-switching in children's interactions.

The continuing demand for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies may inspire researchers to investigate the language use of children

from different socio-economic backgrounds and children whose first language is not necessarily English.

Child language researchers may also pursue studies that would examine the implications of the development of first and second languages to language teaching. Moreover, further studies on caregivers' language may prove significant to the development of preschool curriculum and instructional materials.

It is this researcher's hope that this investigation will encourage other studies on child language in the Philippine context—whether they are phonologically, morphologically, syntactically, or pragmatically oriented.

As a final word, it still amazes me how a child's babble led to this research. There are more things to know about child language. More research is needed to bolster my findings. One thing is clear, however. To this day, we cannot say that we absolutely understand child language. Language acquisition remains a mystery.

References

Austin, J. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words.* Cambridge: Harvard UP.

Bar-Adon, A. and Leopold, W.F. 1971. *Child Language: A Book of Readings.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Bates, E. 1976. *Language and Context: The Acquisition of Pragmatics.* New York: Academic Press.

Baumert, M. 1977. "Classification of English Question-Answer Structures." *Journal of Pragmatics* 1: 85-92.

Behnstedt, P. 1973. *Viens-tu? Estce que tu viens? Tuviens? Formation and Structure of Direct Questions in French.* Tübigen, Germany: Gunter Narr.

Bellugi, U. and Brown, R. 1964. *The Acquisition of Language.* Chicago: Chicago UP.

Bennet-Castor, T. 1988. *Analyzing Children's Language.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd.

Berninger, G. and Garvey, C. "Questions and the Allocation, Construc tion and Timing of Turns in Child Discourse." *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research 10* (4), 375-401, 1981a.

Berninger, G. and Garvey, C. "Relevant Replies to Questions: Answers versus Evasions." *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research 10* (4), 403-419, 1981b.

Bloom, L. and Lahey, M. 1978. *Language Development and Language Disorders.* New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Bloom, L., Rocissano, L., and Hood, L. 1976. "Adult-Child Discourse: Developmental Interaction between Information Processing and Linguistic Knowledge." *Cognitive Psychology 8* (8), 521-552.

Bloom, L. 1991. *Language Development: From Two to Three.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Blum-Kulka, S. and Kasper, G. (Eds.) 1989. *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Requests and Apologies.* New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Brown, R. and Bellugi-Klima, U. 1964. "Three Processes in the Child's Acquisition of Syntax." *Harvard Educational Review 34,* 133-151.

Brown, R., Cazden, C. and Bellugi-Klima, U. 1968. "The Child's Gram mar From I to III." *Child Development 2,* 28-73.

Campbell, R. and Wales, R. 1975. "The Study of Language Acquisition." In S. Rogers (Ed.) *Children and Language: Readings in Early Language and Socialization.* Oxford UP.

Cartwright, C. and Cartwright, G. 1974. *Developing Observation Skills.* New York: Mc-Graw Hill.

Chomsky, N. 1957. *Syntactic Structures.* The Hague: Mouton.

Chomsky, N. 1972. *Language and Mind.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Clark, E. 1983. "Meaning and Concept." In P. Mussen (Ed.) *Handbook of Child Psychology*. New York: Wiley.

Corsaro, W. 1976. "The Clarification Request as a Feature in Adult Inter active Styles with Young Children." *Language in Society*, 183-207.

Coulthard, M. 1985. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*. New   edition. NY: Longman, Inc.De Villiers, J. and De Villiers, P. 1978. *Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

De Villiers, J. and De Villiers, P. 1979. *Early Language: The Developing Child*. Cambridge: Cambrige UP.

Dore, J. 1977. "Oh Them Sheriff: A Pragmatic Analysis Children's Responses." In S. Ervin-Tripp and C. Mitchell-Kernan (Eds). *Child Discourse*. NY: Academic Press.

Ervin-Tripp, S. 1970. "Discourse Agreement: How Children Answer Questions." In J.R. Hayes (Ed.). *Cognition and Development of Language*. NY: John Wiley and Sons.

Ervin-Tripp, S. and Mitchell-Kernan, C. (Eds.). 1977. *Child Discourse*. NY: Academic Press.

Fernald, A. et.al. (Eds.) 1989. "A Cross-Language Study of Prosody Modi fication in Mothers' and Fathers' Speech to Preverbal Infants." *Journal of Child Language 16*, 477- 501.

Foster, S. 1990. *The Communicative Competence of Young Children*. UK: Longman.

French, L. and Maclure, M. 1981. "Teacher's Questions, Pupils' Answers: An Investigation of Questions and Answers in the Infant Classroom." *First Language 2*, 31-45.

Gallaway, C. and Richards. B.J. 1994. *Input and Interaction in Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Garvey, C. and Hogan R. 1973. "Social Speech and Social Interaction: Egocentrism Revisited." *Child Development 44*, 562-568.

Gleason, J.B. 1997. *The Development of Language.* 4ᵗʰ Edition. MA: Allyn and Bacon, Gonzales, A. (1984). *Acquiring Pilipino as a First Language.* Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines.

Grice, H.P. 1967. "Logic and Conversation." In P. Cole and J.L. Morgan (Eds.) *Syntax and Semantics.* London: Academic Press. Also in A.Martinich.

Gumperz, J. 1970. "Sociolinguistics and Communication in Small Group." In JB Pride and J. Holmes (ed.) 1972. *Readings in Sociolinguistics.* London: Penguin.

Gumperz, J. 1982. *Discourse Strategies.* Cambridge UP.

Halliday, M.A.K. 1978. *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpreta tion of Language and Learning.* London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M.A.K. and Hasan, R. 1985. *Language, Context and Text: Aspects of Language in a Social Semiotic Perspective.* Oxford UP.

Hoff, E. 2001. *Language Development.* 2ⁿᵈ Edition. Ca: Wadsworth/ Thomson Learning.

Hymes, D. 1974. *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Kasper, G. and Blum-Kilka, S. 1993. *Interlanguage Pragmatics.* Oxford UP.

Lund, N. Duchan, J. 1988. *Assessing Children's Language In Naturalistic Context.* NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Martinich, A. (Ed.) 1996. *The Philiosophy of Language.* 3ʳᵈ Edition. Oxford UP.

McTear, M. 1985. *Children's Conversation.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd.

Nelson, K. 1981. "Individual Differences in Language Development: Implications for Acquisition and Development." *Developmental Psychology 17,* 170-187.

Newport, E., Gleitman, A. and Gleitman, L. 1977. "Mother I'd Rather do it Myself: Some Effects and Non-Effects Of Maternal Speech Style." In C. Snow and C. Ferguson (Eds.). *Talking to Children: Language Input and Acquisition.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Owens, R. Jr. 1996. *Language Development.* 4th Edition. Ma.: Allyn and Bacon.

Phillips, J. 1973. "Syntax and Vocabulary of Mothers' Speech to Young Children: Age and Sex Comparisons." *Child Development 44,* 182-185.

Piaget, J. 1952. *The Language and Thought of the Child.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Pine, J. 1994. *The Language of Primary Caregivers.* In C. Gallaway and B. Richards.

Reich, P. 1986. *Language Development.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Rogers, S. 1975. *Children and Language: Readings in Early Language and Socialization.* Oxford UP.

Saunders, G. 1982. *Bilingual Children: Guidance for the Family.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Searle, J. 1969. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy Of Language.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Shatz, M. 1978. "Children's Comprehension of their Mothers' Question-Directives." *Journal of Child Language 5,* 39-46.

Shatz, M. 1979. "How to Do Things by Asking: Form-Function Pairings in Mothers' Questions and Their Relation to Children's Responses." *Child Development 50,* 1093-1099.

Sinclair, A. And Van Gessel, R. 1990. "The Form and Function of Questions in Children's Conversation." *Journal Of Pragmatics 14,* 923-944.

Skinner, B.F. 1957. *Verbal Behavior.* NY: Appleton-Century Crofts.

Snow, C. 1972. "Mothers' Speech to Children Learning Language." *Child Development 43*, 549-565.

Snow, C. and Ferguson, C (Eds.) 1977. *Talking to Children: Language Input and Acquisition.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Stern, W. and Stern, C. 1928. "The Chief Periods of Further Speech Development." In Bar-Adon and Leopold. *The Mental Faculties of Children.* In Bar-Adon and Leopold.

Tsui, A. 1992. "A Functional Description of Questions." In M. Coulthard (Ed.) *Advances in Spoken Discourse Analysis.* Routledge.

Weinreich, U. 1953. *Languages in Contact.* New York: Linguistic Circle of New York.