



A Conversation Analysis of Two-year-old Children's Speech in Child-Adult Interactions

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Abstract

Social interactions with adults around them are the main exposures to language that children receive, and these contribute significantly to their development. In response to this, this article examines the participation of two-year-old children in conversations with adults, aimed at describing the parties initiating conversation topics and identifying the structure of the conversations. The research used a qualitative method in the form of a case study, involving 5 children aged two years and their parents as participants. The data were collected through recorded natural conversations between children and parents. The results show that topics in child-adult interactions can be initiated by both parties. Furthermore, children have been able to build a complete conversational structure, consisting of opening, turn-taking, and closing. Several components of turn-taking, such as adjacency pairs and repairs are well performed. These findings suggest that, despite their limited language production, children at the age of two can actively participate in building and developing conversations with their interlocutors.

Keywords: *two-year-old children's speech; conversation structure; child-adult conversation*

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Introduction

Conversation is an activity that takes place when there is at least one speaker and one listener. Exchanging ideas and expressing feelings through conversation will be effective if they have the same understanding in several ways. These include having the same desire to discuss the same thing and knowing the rules related to conversation so that each can contribute to the development and flow of the conversation. Therefore, it is important for each party to cooperate with the other to build a successful interaction. The contribution that can be made by each individual when involved in a conversation is through active participation in turn-taking.

In a conversation that involves a two-year-old child, although the child may not have the ability to pronounce words correctly, it is important to provide opportunities for the child to actively participate in the conversation, such as by stimulating him to take his turns. This will serve as an opportunity for the child to develop his understanding on how to build and develop a conversation as well as an opportunity to improve his speaking ability. Conversations that are built between children aged two to three years and their interlocutors depend heavily on things that are peripheral (additional), such as facial expressions, hand gestures, as well as objects and people around the children (Clark, 2018; Gasioerek et al., 2021). The active participation shown by these children in conversations plays an important role in

shaping their pragmatic abilities in terms of designing speech intentions and in developing their fluency in speaking (Kelly & Bailey, 2013; Onnis et al., 2021; Rijlaarsdam et al., 2013).

Because oral discourse is the most important thing when children communicate with their interlocutors, an analysis of their participation in conversation is very important to do. Conversation analysis was carried out to identify the linguistic characteristics found in conversations and how the participants mutually understand utterances produced by the interlocutors (Casla et al., 2022; Gardner, 2013; Meredith, 2019). In addition, a conversation is also a means of forming social rules as well as a social action in which each participant works together to build and develop it (Chan & Ritchie, 2016; Veneziano, 2014).

Related to the structure, in general, a conversation consists of three components, namely opening, turning, and closing (Clift, 2016; Enfield & Sidnell, 2017). In addition to these three components, there are features such as interruptions, corrections, and overlaps in conversations. The existence of these features varies in different contexts. Along with their age development, children will gradually build their understanding of these various components of speech (Clark, 2014, 2018; Stude, 2014).

Several studies have been conducted on the participation of young children when conversing with their interlocutors, for example regarding the repetition of speech they do when interacting with adults (Casla et al., 2022), the structure of the speech fragments they produce (Lyakso et al., 2019), and the relationship between participation in conversations and early literacy in children (Kaminski et al., 2014). In Indonesia, some research related to early childhood have also been carried out, but most of them are related to early childhood education (Sari & Setiawan, 2020) and the role of the social environment, both the family and educational institutions, on child development (Astuti, 2014; Purwaningsih & Syamsudin, 2022; Setyowati, 2020). Not too many studies have focused on observing the various aspects of language shown by children when interacting with their interlocutors.

Therefore, given the importance of the role of a child's speech in a conversation with his interlocutors and the limited number of studies that have been conducted on the topic in Indonesia, this article examines how the speech of two-year-old children plays a role in building and developing conversations with his interlocutors, especially parents. The objectives are to discuss the topic initiations and structure of the conversations in which two-year-old children become participants. The results of this study will surely bring some additional new knowledge into the study of early childhood language development in Indonesia.

Methodology

This research was conducted qualitatively in the form of a case study. The qualitative method is appropriate to use in this research context because through this method, detailed and in-depth information can be built regarding the aspects studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Leavy, 2017). This study involved five two-year-old children who live in Yogyakarta. The five children come from families with similar economic and social backgrounds. They are Javanese speakers who live on the outskirts of the city. In addition, each of these families is a young family consisting of three members, namely father, mother, and son/daughter.

Before the data were collected, in line with what was presented by Sørensen (2014), to comply with research ethics, the researcher first sent to parents a consent form containing the research procedures and some explanations on the involvement of the participants. Parents' approval of involvement in the research was indicated by their signatures on the consent form. Data were collected by recording in each family a ten to fifteen minutes dyadic or multi-participant conversation between the father and/or mother and their child. The themes of the conversations were about the daily things these children do with their parents.

The collected data were then transcribed phonetically, bearing in mind that at the age of two, many children were still not perfect at pronouncing their words. Therefore, to ensure the accuracy of the transcript, the researcher also asked the parents to check and validate their

child's speech intent. After the transcripts were completed, the utterances produced by the two-year-old children were analyzed to identify how topics were initiated and to describe how the conversations were organized. The results of the analysis were presented qualitatively in the form of descriptive interpretations accompanied by real examples of utterances.

Results and Discussion

Two-year-old Children's Speech and Conversation Topics

Topics to be discussed in a conversation can be determined by any party participating in the conversation. When determining which topics to discuss, there will be negotiations between individuals until a mutual agreement is reached. Therefore, the topic that is finally chosen can be one proposed by any of the participants.

In conversations involving two-year-old children, negotiations about the choice of topics to be discussed also occur (Davis & Qi, 2020; Sairanen et al., 2022). This choice is influenced by several factors, including the curiosity and interest of the children, their experience, and the language exposure they receive from their surroundings. Therefore, when a two-year-old child is involved in a conversation, what is usually discussed is not far from what he experiences. Especially in conversations involving children of this age, the here-and-now concept plays an important role in topic choices as egocentrism is central in their daily life.

Topic Initiation by Two-year-old Children

Two-year-old children usually start conversations with other people by attracting the attention of potential interlocutors. They commonly do this by starting a certain topic and then adding new information to their speech. This way, they provide more details regarding the information they deliver through their utterances (Kelly & Bailey, 2013; Sairanen et al., 2022). An example of a conversation topic initiated by children is presented in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 1

(Child (C) 1 and Mom (M) watch a TV commercial.)

- C1 : **[pak bado]** (pointing to the TV) (1/1)
Pak badut. 'Mr. Clown.'
- M : *Oh Pak badut? Ten pundi e le nonton?*
 'Oh Mr. Clown. Where did you meet him?'
- C1 : **[ne tuba tuba]** (1/2)
Neng lumba-lumba. 'In the dolphin show.'
- M : *Oh nonton lumba-lumba.* 'Oh, in the show.'
- C1 : **[ao ayah]** (1/3)
Karo Ayah. 'With Dad.'
- M : *Karo Ayah.* 'With Dad.'
- C1 : **[ao ibuk]** (1/4)
Karo Ibuk. 'With Mom.'

Excerpt 1 occurs when C1 is commenting on a TV commercial that depicts a clown on a children's program. He starts a conversation with his mother (M) by describing this. Because this is what is currently attracting C1's attention, M responds to C1's speech by following the topic C1 has chosen by asking questions about it. Besides initiating the topic of the conversation, C1 also shows the ability to respond to his mother's utterances. He can function well in the conversation, as shown in the adjacency pair of question and answer in which he places himself as the second pair part, providing an answer represented in the utterance 1/2.

Another example of a child's choice of topic is shown in the following dialogue.

Excerpt 2

(During a drawing activity.)

- C2 : [mɔbi jip] (2/1)
Mobil jip. 'A jeep.'
- M : *O mobil jip. Piye nek nggambar mobil jip? Ngene ki?*
 'Oh, a jeep. How do you draw a jeep? Like this?'
- C2 : [ba ibuk ba ibuk] (2/2)
Ban, Ibuk. Ban, Ibuk. 'The wheel, Mom. The wheel.'
- M : *O ban. Iki cendhelane. Yak, uwis.*
 'Oh the wheel. These are the windows. OK, done.'

This excerpt is the beginning of a conversation between C2 and her mother. In her initial speech, C2 introduces the topic of the conversation in the form of a request, asking her mother to describe a car. Then, the conversation flows around the car they had drawn. Appropriate responses are given by C2 to her mother's utterances, indicating that she already had an awareness of turn-taking and cooperation with her interlocutor to build a conversation. For instance, when her mother starts drawing the car, C2 adds an idea that some wheels need to be drawn to complete the picture of the car (utterance 2/2).

Apart from requests, asking a question is also a way that children can apply when introducing a topic in their conversations with their interlocutors. This is shown in the following dialogue that occurs when C3 watches television with his father.

Excerpt 3

(C3 watches a TV commercial with Dad (D).)

- C3 : [məm əpə] (pointing to the TV) (3/1)
Maem apa? 'What is he eating?'
- D : *Coklat.* 'Chocolate.'
- C3 : [totat] (3/2)
Coklat. 'Chocolate.'
- D : *Nggih. Nek sik kuwi?* 'Yes. What about it?'
- C3 : [mai tatit] (3/3)
Marai sakit. 'Makes you ill.'

In the dialogue above, C3 initiates the topic by asking a question about an advertisement on television. In the TV commercial, C3 notices a person eating something that he is unsure about. His father responds to this question in the form of an answer and then stimulates C3 to discuss the topic further; that eating too much chocolate will make him sick.

When a child brings a topic to be discussed in a conversation in which he becomes one of the participants, the interlocutor tends to follow the child's wishes by stimulating him to further discuss the topic. The negotiations that take place between the child and the interlocutor are not clearly expressed since usually the interlocutor immediately agrees on the topic introduced by the child.

Topic Initiation by Interlocutors

In addition to being initiated by children, topics in conversations that involve two-year-old children can also be initiated by the interlocutors. They play an important role in developing conversations with the children, among other things by bringing the children to talk with them on a topic they have chosen. As mentioned by Rowe & Leech (2019) and Ramírez et al. (2020), adult language input is important for children's language development. By stimulating children to give responses to their utterances, parents and other adults introduce children to patterns of conversation, especially related to turn-taking management.

An example of a conversation topic chosen by the interlocutor when talking to a two-year-old child is in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 4

(A joint drawing activity between C4 and his Mom.)

- C4 : **[ini ini wae] (4/1)**
Ini, ini wae. 'This, this.'
- M : *Ini wae. Nggambar uwit emoh?*
 'This. What about drawing a tree?'
- C4 : **[mau] (4/2)**
Mau. 'OK.'
- M : *Wit apa?* 'What kind of tree?'
- C4 : **[wit dabu] (4/3)**
Wit jambu. 'Guava.'

In Excerpt 4, C4 was led to follow the topic that had been chosen by his mother. There was a negotiation between them at the beginning of the conversation when they both expressed their respective choices. Until finally, they could agree to carry out a joint activity of drawing a guava tree. C4's mother stimulates C4 to respond to her question in order to make C4 understand that a question needs to be paired with an answer and he is the one expected to provide it.

Another example of topic initiation by the interlocutors is presented in Excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5

(A meatball seller is approaching, making *ting ting* sounds)

- D : *Lha kae suara apa e?* 'What sound is that?'
- C5 : **[cəwawat] (5/1)**
Pesawat. 'A plane.'
- D : (increasing intonation) *Suara...* 'The sound of...'
- C5 : **[ato] (5/2)**
Bakso. 'Meatball.'
- D : *Eh, watu?* 'Eh, a stone?'
- C5 : **[cə bat bato yə bato] (5/3)**
So bak bakso, ya bakso. 'Meat-ball, yes meatball.'

In the excerpt above, the father stimulates his child to follow the topic he has chosen by taking advantage of a situation that is currently making the child interested. C5 attentively listens to some sound coming from in front of his house, indicating that a meatball seller is passing by. His father asks C5 what sound it is. Because C5 is still affected by the topic discussed earlier about vehicles, C5 replies that it is the sound of an airplane. A few moments later, he corrects it and says that it is a sign of a meatball seller passing by. The conversation continues discussing meatballs and other foods.

The two examples above show that when the interlocutor offers his topic to be discussed, he does not necessarily force it on the child, but makes an offer first. If the child still does not want to follow the topic he has chosen, usually the interlocutor will not impose his will and follow the child's will or even change the topic to a new one according to what they can agree on later. Therefore, the basic nature of conversations that involve children as one of the speakers lies mainly on the interest of the children.

Two-year-old Children's Speech and Conversation Structure

In terms of the structure, the conversations between two-year-old children and their interlocutors have met the main requirements of a conversation, in which an opening, turn-

taking, and closing are present. However, not all recorded conversations in this study include these three elements. Based on the data obtained, of the five recorded conversations between two-year-old children and their parents, only one of them is complete in terms of the structure. Nevertheless, it can be said that, in general, two-year-old children are able to recognize and apply common conversational structures.

Opening

There is only one datum of opening used by two-year-old children when conversing with their interlocutors in this study. This occurs because the conversation recording is done naturally and the children's interlocutors are their parents, with whom the children spend most of their time every day. An example of an opening is presented in the following excerpt, when C3 sees one of his friends, who is seven years old, passing by in front of his house.

Excerpt 6

(Mom is spoon-feeding C3. They are sitting on the terrace. They notice a Friend (F) passes by.)

- C3 : [jo?e cini] (waving his hands) (13/1)
 Joel, *sini*. 'Joel, come here.'
- F : (approaching C3 and M) Eh, ana C3. 'Eh, C3.'
- C3 : [alo] (13/2)
 Halo. 'Hello.'
- F : *Maem pake apa?* 'What do you eat?'

The opening made by C3 to open a conversation with his friend in the conversation above does not only consist of a greeting, but also includes an invitation accompanied by a wave of the hand so that F approaches him. Only after F approaches C3 did C3 say a greeting in the form of the word 'hello'. The response given by F is not in the form of a greeting as spoken by C3, but a question related to what C3 is doing, that is eating. This brief opening leads them to be more engaged in the conversation.

Turn-taking

In a conversation, the roles of a speaker and a listener alternate regularly. The person who speaks for the first time will become a listener as soon as the interlocutor begins to speak. The rules regarding turns in conversations may differ from one society to another because they are influenced by various factors, one of which is the speech situation (Casillas, 2014).

From an early age, adults always encourage children to take turns as speakers and listeners in a conversation. This also occurs when adults talk to babies. Everything that the baby does is considered as a turn, for example, when he blinks or yawns after hearing the speech of an adult who is talking to him (Keel, 2016; Ninio, 2014). Then, when the child begins to develop his ability to speak, his interlocutor will provide both explicit and non-explicit clues about this turn-taking system. For instance, an adult will show examples of dialogues where he asks something and answers it at the same time. This is done so that the child can understand that such a way indicates when it is his turn to speak or listen.

Several elements of turn-taking include adjacency pairs, interruptions, and repairs. Among them, only adjacency pairs and repairs are found in two-year-old children's speech in the present study.

Adjacency Pairs

Adjacency pairs are sequences of two related utterances uttered by different speakers (Feifei, 2020; Lam, 2018). The second speaker's speech is usually a response to the first speaker's, e.g. a pair of question-answer and greeting-greeting (Clift, 2016; Keel, 2016). Based

on the data used in this study, the question-answer pair is mostly found in conversations between two-year-old children and their interlocutors, as presented in the following dialogue.

Excerpt 7

(C2 and Mom are reading a story.)

- M : *Yo kuwi dudu omahe Boim no.*
'It is not Boim's house.'
- C2 : **[uduk] (7/1)**
Dudu? 'Isn't it?'
- M : *Udu. Omahe dhedhek udu?*
'No. Is it yours?'
- C2 : **[uduk] (7/2)**
Dudu. 'No.'
- M : *Lha omahe sapa?* 'Whose is it then?'
- C2 : **[mae abel] (6/69)**
Omahe Abel. 'Abel's.'

In Excerpt 7, the question-answer pair occurs between C2 and her mother. In the first pair part, C2 responds to M's speech with a question (7/1) whose purpose was to ensure the truth of M's speech. In the second pair part, C2 gave a response in the form of an answer (7/2) to her mother's question.

Adjacency pairs between two-year-old children and their interlocutors almost always place children as the second person providing answers to the first person's questions. This is closely related to one of the main characteristics of interactions between adults and children: that adults always encourage children to actively participate in conversations by stimulating them with various questions so that children answer and indirectly know when it is their turn to speak in a conversation.

Even though these children understand that every question asked by their interlocutors must be responded to, sometimes they still ignore it. For example, when having a conversation with his father, C4 asks questions and answers them himself (utterances 8/1 and 8/2). This can be seen in the following excerpt.

Excerpt 8

(C4 is pointing to a handphone on the table.)

- C4 : **[ɔnɔ pene cɔpɔ ini] (8/1)**
Ana hapene sapa ini? 'Whose phone is this?'
- [apene ibuk] (8/2)**
Hapene Ibuk. 'It's Mom's.'
- [hapene cɔpɔ ini hapene cɔpɔ] (8/3)**
Hapene sapa ini, hapene sapa? 'Whose phone, is it? Whose phone?'
- D : *Hapeku.* 'Mine.'
- C4 : **[bɔne ibuk ah] (8/4)**
Nggone Ibuk ah. 'It's Mom's.'

In Excerpt 8, the adjacency pairs occur in the form of a question and answer between C4 (8/3) and D, followed with a disagreement used by C4 (8/4) to respond to D's statement. In his first utterance, C4 asked D who owns the handphone he sees. Before D answers, C4 says that it belongs to his mother. A few moments later, he asks D again the same question. D responds by saying that it is his. Because he disagrees, C4 responds to this statement with a denial which explicitly means that he believes that it is his mother's. In the excerpt, there are two types of adjacency pairs that are found, namely question-and-answer and statement-denial.

Based on the examples above, it is observed that two-year-old children can understand the concept of adjacency pairs in conversations, although they do not always use them. This is due to the children's high level of egocentrism so that they only respond to the things they need, desire, or are interested in. The older they get, children will develop more understanding of adjacency pairs along with other developments in language.

Repair

Repairs can be done by both children and their interlocutors. A repair is a correction of any mistakes regarding the information delivered in utterances which may cause any misunderstanding to occur (Clark, 2020; Clayman & Raymond, 2021). For example, a repair in terms of phonology is carried out when a certain word is pronounced incorrectly as it should, or when a concept is incorrectly expressed (Clark, 2020; Kitzinger, 2013).

In common child-adult interactions, adults rarely correct what children say. When they do, the repair is meant to ensure that what the child means is true or to correct any wrong pronunciation of words. This is motivated by the understanding that the child's ability to produce recognizable words in a language is one of the main requirements for establishing conversation (Clark, 2020; Romeo et al., 2018).

In this study, there were no adults' speeches that contain repairs to correct children's speech. When there is a mistake in the pronunciation of certain words made by two-year-old children, the interlocutors always let it go with the assumption that it is because of the children's phonological abilities are still limited. Later, children will realize by themselves when they make this type of mistake.

The repairs found in the data in this study all came from children. As in the following excerpt, C1 makes a mistake when saying the word 'Dad'. He then corrects it himself (9/2).

Excerpt 9

(Dad is accompanying C1 watching a children's series on TV.)

D : *Ngapa kuwi? Bapak- bapake tiba.*

'What is he doing? The man is falling.'

C1 : **[tibɔ] (9/1)**

Tiba.

'Falling.'

D : *Tiba.*

'Falling.'

C1 : **[tibɔ bapbap bapa?e] (9/2)**

Tiba bap-bap bapake. 'Falling. The man is falling.'

The above conversation occurs when C1 has a conversation with his father while they are watching television. At that time, there is a scene of a man falling on the highway. When he is about to tell that the man is falling, C1 makes a mistake in pronouncing the word *bapak* as [bapbap]. As soon as he realizes this mistake, he says again the word correctly *bapake* 'the man' (9/2).

In another speech situation, a repair is also found in C5's utterance (10/2) in Excerpt 10. Here, C5 wants to say that the money used to buy the handphone is his mother's, but what comes out is utterance (10/2).

Excerpt 10

(C5 holds a handphone and looks attentively at it.)

C5 : **[hpne gne ayah] (10/1)**

Hapene nggone Ayah. 'The phone belongs to Dad.'

M : *Tuku nggo dhuwite sopo?* 'Whose money is it to buy the phone?'

C5 : **[go dite ai ibuk] (10/2)**

Nganggo dhuwite Ay(ah) - Ibuk. 'It's Da(d)'s - Mom's.'

When saying the utterance (10/2), C5 is influenced by the fact that previously his interlocutor is his father, so he accidentally says the word *Ayah* 'Dad'. Realizing his mistake right away, C5 immediately corrects his speech to *Ibuk* 'mother'.

Both examples of repairs in the present study are classified as self-repairs as they are initiated and produced by the children themselves. This fact implies that two-year-old children already develop the ability to monitor their speaking and immediately correct their utterances whenever possible.

Closing

Of all the recorded conversations between two-year-old children and their interlocutors, Excerpt 11 is the only one that shows how closings are used. This is part of a conversation between C3 and his mother. While eating on the terrace, C3 sees one of his seven-year-old friends passing by and then his friend approaches him. The conversation then continues, until a few moments later F is about to go home because he is going to take a shower.

Excerpt 11

(F is about to leave.)

F : *Udah dulu ya dek. Pakpung sik.*

'Bye. I need to take a shower.'

C3 : **[dada]** (11/1)

Dadah.

'Bye.'

[tentu] (11/2)

Thank you.

Unlike opening, which is initiated by children as the first speaker, in the dialogue above it appears that the farewell is initiated by F and only then did C3 respond. The expressions of farewell by F and C3 are not the same. Nevertheless, from the overall meaning carried by each speech, it can be concluded that the adjacency pair that occurs at the end of this conversation is an exchange of greetings as a form of closing the conversation.

In general, the results of this study show a variety of new things that can be used to complement the results of previous studies. One of them is related to the fulfillment of a complete conversation structure consisting of opening, turn-taking, and closing by two-year-old children in their conversations with their parents. In fact, the speaking ability of children aged two years is not perfect both in terms of pronunciation and complexity of speech. Nonetheless, an understanding regarding the structure of the intact conversation has been built. Several previous studies conducted by Anggraini (2021) and Puspita et al. (2022) focus on the influence of parents on children's language development, and no one has really looked into details regarding children's participation in building and developing conversation topics as was done in this study. In addition, in a broader context, the results of this study also complement several previous studies such as those conducted by Wilson & Durbin (2013), Davis-Kean et al. (2016), dan Schwab et al. (2018), especially those related to the topic initiation by children's interlocutor which is seen as one of the contributions made by adults to improve the ability of two-year-old children in language.

Conclusion

Two-year-old children have been able to become active participants when they are involved in conversations with adults around them, especially their parents. Although in terms of pronunciation their fluency is not perfect yet, the children's understanding regarding how to start, maintain, and change conversation topics can be observed. Topics of conversations involving them as their participants are both initiated by these children and their interlocutors. This indicates that the children already have some awareness of how to

perform in a conversation. The same goes for conversational structure. Two-year old children can understand the concepts of opening, turn-taking, and closing and apply them in conversations. Although not all features of turn-taking have been mastered, it seems that the awareness of adjacency pairs and repair when making mistakes has grown. This implies that children are developing their language skills in a more advanced direction, which can be assisted by parents by involving them in verbal interactions. As a concluding remark, the results of this study are expected to be useful for parents, early childhood educators, and education practitioners in general. However, because the scope of this research is still limited, it is suggested that future researchers examine similar topics in a more detailed manner by involving more participants so that the results will be more comprehensive.

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