

Spontaneous Verbal Repetitions in Child Language: A Pragmatic Perspective

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Abstract. The present study examines the initiators, forms, and functions of spontaneous verbal repetitions done by children when they are conversing with their peers in kindergarten environment. The study was a mixed-method one, involving 22 4-to-6 years old children attending a kindergarten in Yogyakarta as its participants. The data were utterances containing repetitions and a 2-hour recording transcript of the conversations among these children served as the data source of this study. The results show that kindergarten children mostly initiate the repetitions themselves rather than using them to respond to others' initiation. In terms of their forms, repetitions done by kindergarten children mostly occur in the form of expanded repetitions, where these children add some new information to accompany the repetitions. Meanwhile, among other functions, most repetitions are to restate the children's own utterances.

Keywords: repetition, child language, pragmatics, kindergarten

1 Introduction

The discussion of the language mastered by children has always been one of the interesting topics of discussion in the field of linguistics. Although basically all children around the world learn their first language in a similar way, each child's development in language is something unique to them, both in terms of speed and results of acquisition. Various studies have been conducted to observe various aspects of language development in children, including the acquisition of the phonological system [1], lexicons [2,3], pragmatic elements [4,5] to more details regarding the characteristics of their language, such as the use of specific language styles [6,7], various use of intonation [8,9], and word choice [10,11].

In relation to the characteristics of child language, especially regarding word choice in speaking, children tend to use simple words that meet the here-and-now principle, in a simple syntactic structure, and use many repetitions [12,13]. If in adult speech repetition tends to be referred to as one of the markers of lack of fluency in speaking, the phenomenon of repetition that is often found in child language can imply various things other than lack of fluency in speaking. At first children repeat by imitating what is said by their interlocutors in order to improve their understanding of the speech and then begin to use the repetition for other purposes in speaking

[14,15]. Therefore, repetition is not only important as a correction when an error occurs in speech.

Repetition in language is marked by the presence of certain parts that are mentioned more than once in an utterance. A repetition can be done spontaneously or not. Spontaneous verbal repetitions are described as total or partial reproductions of the utterances spoken by the interlocutors [12]. These repetitions are called spontaneous because they are not intended as a strategy to achieve certain goals, although factually there are various functions that are implicitly carried over in these repetitions. In the context of conversations involving children, all the repetitions they do can be categorized as spontaneous verbal repetitions, which play an important role in their language development [12].

Repetitions can occur because they are triggered by one of the parties involved in a conversation, either by the speaker or his interlocutor. In terms of the initiators, repetitions can be categorized as self-repetitions, which are initiated by the speaker himself, and allo-repetitions, which are a type of repetition initiated by the interlocutors [16]. Repetitions can appear at the beginning, middle, or end of an utterance, exactly in the same form as the previous element which is repeated (termed as exact repetitions), or with modifications by changing some of the elements (either expanded or reduced repetitions), or through paraphrases [12,16]. The concept of allo-repetition is often referred to as other-repetition [17]. Meanwhile, pragmatically, based on the communicative functions they carry, repetitions can be used to request, state, imitate, or show involvement in performative plays, as well as used as a form of conversational devices [18].

In the context of Indonesian child language, there were several previous studies related to the use of repetition. Some observed how repetitions were used to show the directive aspects of an utterance [19, 20] and only one study examined how repetitions carry some interactional functions in conversations in which preschoolers are involved [21]. Not much research has been done to delve deeper into the origin of repetitions and how they are manifested in speech. In response to this, this study investigates the parties who act as the initiators of repetitions, the forms of these repetitions, and the communicative functions brought about by these forms of repetition in the context of conversations involving children as their participants.

2 Method

The study was using a mixed-methods design, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data. Mixed-methods research integrates both types of data in a single project, with the aim of producing more comprehensive findings and minimizing the limitations of each approach [22, 23]. The qualitative data used in this study were in the form of repetitions found in the speech of kindergarten children when conversing with their peers in the school environment, while the quantitative data were in the form of the frequency of occurrence of these repetitions along with their percentages. These quantitative data were used to support the qualitative interpretation and description.

The source of data in this study was a conversation between kindergarten children and their peers in one of the kindergartens in Yogyakarta. A total of 22 children participated in this study, with an age range of 4-6 years. An informed consent regarding the involvement of these children was distributed to the parents and they had consented before the data collection began.

The data were collected by recording the conversation involving kindergarten children with their peers for 2 hours and then it was orthographically transcribed. The transcript was then scrutinized to observe the occurrence of repetitions in order to classify their initiators, forms, and communicative functions. The data that had been identified were then analyzed by using a data sheet as the research instrument. Another instrument used was Microsoft Excel, which was for calculating the frequency of occurrence of the repetitions. Trustworthiness of the data was achieved by means of triangulation by theory. The findings were presented in the form of diagrams and then interpreted and described qualitatively.

3 Results and Discussion

The findings show that there are 246 spontaneous verbal repetitions out of a total of 1027 utterances produced by the participants in this study, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The initiators, forms, and communicative functions of repetitions in child language

Features	Frequency	Percentage
Initiators		
a. Self-repetitions	180	73.17
b. Other-repetitions	66	26.83
Forms		
a. Expanded repetitions	147	59.76
b. Exact repetitions	64	26.02
c. Paraphrases	21	8.54
d. Reduced repetitions	14	5.69
Communicative Functions		
a. Statement	118	47.97
b. Request	67	27.24
c. Performative play	29	11.79
d. Conversational device	18	7.32
e. Imitation	14	5.69

As presented in Table 1, in terms of the initiators of the repetitions, the participants themselves are the main initiators. Instead of responding to others' initiation, they tend to repeat their own utterances during the conversation. This type of repetition is done mainly because kindergarten children are still egocentric, mainly making statements about themselves and focusing on their own interests rather than on others'. This is visible in all their daily behaviors, including in their verbal behaviors when interacting with peers in school environment. In using language, these children present this through their fulfillment of the here-and-now principle: that everything they tell is about objects, activities, and people who are with them at the moment of speaking. They still show the tendency to use the first person perspective, indicated by the frequent use of words such as 'I', 'me', and 'my', and the mention of their own names when speaking. Therefore, the repetitions carried out by kindergarten children are mostly self-initiated to strengthen these aspects.

Meanwhile, other-repetitions, which are initiated by kindergarten children's interlocutors are also present in the data although their frequency of occurrence is much lower than self-repetitions. In addition to using self-repetitions for making statements about themselves, these children are also using other-repetitions for the same purpose. This finding strengthens the idea that 4 to 6 year old children spontaneously repeat their verbal expressions without any specific strategies but to make their statement more heard by their interlocutors. This is seen as these children's efforts for establishing their participation in the conversation and maintaining it.

In terms of their forms, all types of repetitions are present in kindergarten children's utterances. However, the main form of repetitions done by these children mostly is in the form of expanded repetitions. Expanded repetitions are those in which the speakers add some new information in the repeated elements [12]. Therefore, the repetitions result in longer verbal expressions than the original repeated parts. The added information is usually about or related to the speakers themselves and it is spontaneously meant to provide a more detailed explanation regarding the message to be delivered through the speakers' utterances as well as to emphasize or confirm the repeated elements.

Other forms of repetitions are present in kindergarten children's utterances but not as frequent as expanded repetitions. Exact repetitions are the second to use, which shows the retention of the features of repetitions by younger children. Meanwhile, modifications in the form of paraphrases are not used often considering that constructing paraphrases requires a more sophisticated vocabulary mastery. However, children at this age have also begun to abandon the form of reduced repetitions because they want to show more involvement when interacting with their peers so they tend to choose a longer form through the addition of repeated elements rather than reducing them.

In addition, among other communicative functions, most repetitions are to restate the children's own utterances, making their interlocutors more attentive to what they say. This function is a manifestation of the recognition process of these children for objects, activities, or people they know or have met before. Then they share this with their interlocutors, putting a stronger emphasis on the repeated elements to show their importance for both the speaker and his interlocutors.

Besides to make a stronger statement, repetitions are also used to request the interlocutors to provide some information or action. Through this function, it is obvious that children aged 4 to 6 years can contribute to creating a well-managed conversation with their interlocutors, which is shown by the way they invite their interlocutors to take their turns.

Meanwhile, to show the children's involvement in performative plays, to utilize repetitions as a form of conversational devices, and to imitate are the next communicative functions of kindergarten children's repetitions. Through these functions, they are able to establish or maintain interpersonal contact with their interlocutors by showing their active participation in the conversation. The infrequent use of repetitions to imitate signals that compared to younger children, children at this age are progressing to use a language that is more similar to that of adults.

To sum up, the findings related to the initiators, forms, and functions of spontaneous verbal repetitions of the kindergarten children who participated in this study showed that there is a fairly obvious development regarding the use of language in these children. If in younger age

children repetitions tend to be a form of imitation of the speech of adults around them without any specific purpose except to practice their speaking skills, then at the age of 4 to 6 years, children have started to show significant development regarding the repetitions they use. These children mostly repeat their own utterances using expanded repetitions with some additional new information as they want to attract more attention from their interlocutors. Therefore, the imitative function of repetitions has been greatly reduced, replaced by their need to be heard by their interlocutors through their statements, requests, and efforts to establish and maintain interpersonal contacts with their interlocutors.

4 Conclusion

Repetition is a significant feature of the language of young children, which is indicated by its much higher frequency than in the language spoken by adults. In the phenomenon of repetition carried out by kindergarten children aged 4 to 6 years, this feature is also still quite a lot to be found. However, repetition in this age group has been manifested in more diverse forms and functions than in younger children. Compared to other-repetitions, self-repetitions are still being the main form of repetitions. They are mainly used for restating, emphasizing, and confirming the repeated elements in children's previous utterances through expanded repetitions that involve the addition of some new information.

The results of this study can enrich the repertoire of knowledge in the field of child language acquisition and pragmatics. However, considering the limited scope and number of participants in the study, it is recommended for future researchers to be able to conduct similar studies but in a wider scope and involve more participants to obtain more comprehensive and generalizable results.

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