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ABSTRACT

An analysis of utterances made by children and teachers in Norwegian day care centers over a period of several years suggests that from a communicative and functional viewpoint, young children's use of language depends on: (1) the kind of play activitiy; and (2) the preschool teacher's participation and language, which reflects her attitude and personality. In general, frequent use of the four types of utterance examined (intellectual, instructive, socio-emotional, and dialogue-supporting) was associated with more active participation in playgroup interaction. The activity of role-playing promotes these speech acts and implies a higher proportion of communicative utterances. While these activities can not be called teaching, they may be educational and do imply that learning is occurring. Young children and those with poor communication skills appear to improve their language use and social behavior through role-playing. Two main types of preschool teacher language were identified: a language of teaching (either for subject teaching or language instruction) and a language of ordinary adult-child communication. Further research into the educational effects of these two language types may illuminate children's cognitive development. A brief bibliography is included. (MSE)

LANGUAGE IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN A FUNCTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper gives a brief account of our research on preschool children's speech in small groups. We do not only presuppose that learning and teaching take place in daycare centres and kindergartens but also that verbal communication with playmates as well as with teachers influences the thinking, attitudes, and well-being of an individual young child. It is important to study this verbal communication in terms of the functions which the utterances made by children and teachers may have. We only present results from our investigations which concern (1) the impact of adult participation and type of play upon children's use of language; (2) differences in teachers' use of language; and (3) some characteristics of "the language of language teaching in kindergartens".

Description of utterance functions in children

As stated in more detail elsewhere (Vedeler 1985; Vejleskov 1978, 1982), our investigations have been inspired by the Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1971) theory of speech acts. This philosophical approach to language is, naturally, of a general nature and states that each utterance has an illocutionary force. Consequently, neither Austin's rather general categorization of five distinctive types of illocutionary act nor Searle's discussion of the set of rules constituting each kind of illocutionary act form a suitable basis for a concrete, psychological observation and description of children's speaker intentions. Correspondingly, Halliday's (1975) theory of three linguistic metafunctions determining the form of each spoken (or written) utterance does not make up a sufficient framework for a functional (or pragmatic) characterization of concrete utterances made by a certain child in a certain context or situation. However, the works of these scholars clearly explain that there is a need to examine

children's speech to answer the question of what a child of three, four, five, etc., can wish to do by making an oral utterance?

During a series of pilot studies it became evident that it was both possible and meaningful to observe episodes of interaction in small groups of preschool children and, for each utterance, record its function, ie. the speaker's intention as he makes that utterance.

This is no place to discuss the psychological-epistemological problems connected with the concepts of 'intention', 'unconscious intention', etc. Nor will we discuss the relationship between illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts. Rather we shall confine ourselves to briefly mentioning the rather common-sense insights of the experienced preschool teachers who served as observers during the pilot studies: they found it very natural to characterize the utterances made by the children in terms of functions, although they also were aware of the fact that in some cases their interpretations were uncertain.

Gradually we ended up having a method of observation and recording which had the following traits:

- we normally recorded the episodes on videotape and had at least two persons involved in the categorization;
- we used a rather extensive list of functional categories and also allowed the observers to record a supplementary utterance function if this was felt to result in a more satisfactory and precise characterization; and
- we maintained that the categorization of the function of an utterance, ie. the intention or speech act of a speaker, depends on an interpretation of the whole situation including other expressions on the part of speaker, reactions on the part of listener(s), the interactional 'climate' in the group, the play activity going on, etc.

During the last few years, our recordings have been based upon a list of 23 functional categories as shown in Table 1 which also presents some of the possible reductions of the categories. The 18 categories are used in an intensive analysis of utterance functions and can be further reduced in different ways. The 14 categories which were further reduced to 7 groups of functions were used in an analysis which especially focussed upon interactions during role play (Vedeler 1985). In that study certain utterance functions were further specified by means of some subcategorizations to be recorded as supplementary functions in the recording scheme. For instance, directing utterances about the roles of the role play may, in various ways, serve speaker intentions to create a context for the play, and more detailed analyses of social or emotional functions of utterances

during play may reflect the interpersonal relations between the children in a more satisfactory way (cf. Table 2).

Other variables

In addition to the recording of each utterance and its function, we have taken a number of other variables into account some of which are concerned with communication patterns. For each utterance we have recorded who was the speaker, who, if anybody, did provoke it, who if anybody, was the intended receiver, and who, if anybody, answered it. This information enables us to characterize each utterance in terms of 'communicative value' as well as each episode in terms of communication patterns, and each participant in terms of responsiveness, communicative interest, etc. It also makes it possible for us to analyse the frequency of each utterance function in private speech vs. speech to playmates vs. speech to preschool teachers.

Another variable concerns role play. For each utterance it was recorded whether it was made by the child as he 'was' another person, whether it was about the roles and the role play, or whether it had nothing to do with role play. This is due to the fact that not only the form but also the function of children's utterances may be affected by their participation in this rather frequent kind of play.

Some additional variables are attached to the utterance function itself. Firstly, we recorded the degree of intended influence shown by the speaker as he made the utterance, eg. whether he was very eager to influence the listener or whether the utterance was private speech. Secondly, we recorded the explicitness of the function, ie. whether the function was made explicit ("I warn you: if ..."), whether the function was implicit, or whether the utterance was an indirect speech act.

Finally some variables are concerned with the form and content of the individual utterance. Thus the length and the thematic content as well as the dialogical status of each utterance were recorded. The latter term refers to a characterization of the utterance with respect to its relationship to the previous utterance, ie. whether the dialogue is interrupted, continued, developed, etc. (cf. Söderbergh 1980).

SPEAKER WANTS TO....	REDUCTION TO 18 CATEGORIES	REDUCTION TO 14 CATEGORIES	7 GROUPS OF UTTERANCE FUNCTIONS
"examine" listener or control his knowledge get information about something from listener tell listener something	examine get information tell	examine get knowledge tell	INTELLECTUAL
state a fact, eg. by answering "yes" or "no" carry on conversation, be polite	state be polite	support dialogue	DIALOGUE-SUPPORTING
stick to one's own	stick to one's own	stick to one's own	SOCIAL
ask for support or acceptance ask for sympathy	make an appeal	make an appeal	
make contact with somebody	make contact	make contact	
influence another person's feelings positively express his own positive feelings	influence positively express pos. feeling	infl./express pos.	EMOTIONAL
express his own negative feelings influence another person's feelings negatively	express neg. feeling influence negatively	infl./express neg.	
instruct somebody, explain something to somebody direct others' activity for educational reasons	instruct	instruct	INSTRUCTIONAL
have something done, get help from somebody get something	have someth. (instrumental)	have someth. (instrumental)	DIRECTING
direct others' activity ("you")	direct others	direct others	
plan the activity of his own group ("we") support the activity of his own group ("we")	direct own group		
plan his own activity ("I") support his own activity ("I")	direct himself	direct himself	SELF-DIRECTING
no special function (word play, etc.)	no function	no function	NO FUNCTION

Table 1. The 23 utterance functions used in the recording of the material for the study reported here and three examples of reduced categorizations.

Subfunctions concerning role play. The speaker intends to form a context for the play in terms of	Subfunctions concerning interpersonal relations. The speaker intends to ...
- a (fictive) person	- do someone a favour
- (fictive) animals or things	- exercise authority
- (fictive) localities	- be kind or helpful
- (fictive) events	- be generous
- (fictive) qualities (eg. that someone is ill)	- be aggressive
	- avoid or run away from the interaction
	- warn
	- express his need for help/support/explanation etc.
	- be smart or sly

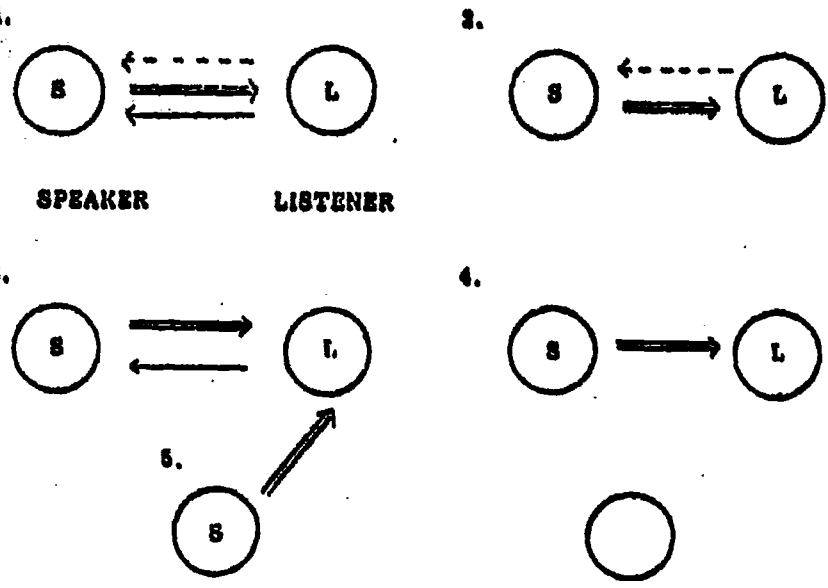
Table 2. Examples of supplementary functions used in some studies.

Results

In this section we will present some preliminary analyses of utterances made by children and teachers in small groups observed during the past years in natural settings (daycare centres) in Oslo.

We will only pay attention to some of the variables mentioned above, namely

- the distribution in percentage of utterances according to 'communicative value', which reflects communication patterns during the episodes in question (see Figure 1);
- the distribution in percentage of utterances according to their function, using the categorization shown in Table 1; and
- the average number of words per utterance, ie. mean utterance length.



<------ Provoking utterance
⟹ The utterance in question
<—— Answering utterance

1. The utterance is an answer and it is answered.
2. The utterance is an answer.
3. The utterance is answered.
4. The utterance is not an answer nor is it answered.
5. The utterance is private.

Figure 1. The five categories according to "communication value".

Table 3 presents the results such as they turned out in three kindergartens during construction play with and without teacher participation. In kindergarten I the data stems from several episodes with three resp. eight different children in different constellations playing the same kind of play, whereas in each of the two other kindergartens (D and E) the same three children play at first in the presence of their teacher and afterwards alone.

KINDERGARTEN		I				E				D		
TEACHER		ABSENT	ACTIVE			ABSENT	ACTIVE			ABSENT	ACTIVE	
SPEAKERS		CHILDREN	CHILDREN	TEACHER	BOTH	CHILDREN	CHILDREN	TEACHER	BOTH	CHILDREN	CHILDREN	TEACHER
COLUMN		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
COMMUNICATIVE VALUE												
- answers & answered	(1)	21	28	25	28	28	21	27	23	9	28	24
- answers	(2)	15	18	31	21	18	15	38	24	17	23	41
- answered	(3)	13	12	12	12	12	21	7	16	3	28	12
- neither-nor	(4)	23	15	32	19	24	28	28	28	34	13	18
- private	(5)	28	27	0	21	18	15	0	0	38	10	6
UTTERANCE FUNCTION												
- intellectual		11	18	21	18	9	18	15	17	6	18	31
- instructional		9	7	30	12	7	3	34	15	4	5	26
- social-emotional		21	20	15	18	43	28	4	14	58	38	11
- directing/instrumental		27	18	12	15	16	18	24	18	3	2	15
- dialogue supporting		7	13	22	15	10	22	23	22	7	28	17
- self directing		28	26	0	21	18	25	0	15	30	0	0
MEAN LENGTH OF UTTERANCE		4.7	5.3	6.8	5.7	4.7	4.3			5.0	4.9	
NUMBER OF UTTERANCES		396	1004	274	1279	348	224	141	365	70	40	34

Table 3. The results from three daycare centres.

Comparison of the figures in columns (1) and (2), (5) and (6), and (9) and (10) implies some aspects of children's speech as it may be affected by adult participation. Thus, in kindergartens I and D, but not in E, adult participation brings about an increase of proper communication, and a decrease in private utterances as well as utterances which are neither answers nor answered. In all kindergartens it brings in more frequent use of utterances with intellectual and dialogue-supporting functions. In kindergartens I and E, adult participation means fewer instrumental-directing utterances, and in kindergartens E and D it means fewer social-emotional utterances. Finally, in kindergarten E the children produce more self-directing utterances when the teacher takes part in the talk, whereas in the other kindergartens, and especially in kindergarten D, the frequency of self-directing utterances decreases among the children.

The differences may partly be due to the teacher's use of verbal utterance. A comparison between columns (3), (7) and (11) shows that the teacher in kindergarten E made more utterances with instructional and instrumental-directing functions, and fewer utterances with intellectual and social-emotional functions than the two other teachers. Frequent use of command may thus imply that children communicate less so that half of their utterances have selfdirecting or dialogue supporting functions (the latter often referring to "yes" or "no" utterances).

However, the interpretation of the figures in Table 3 must take the age and communicative skill of the children into account. The age ranges in kindergartens E and D are 5;0 - 5;9 and 5;6 - 7;2 respectively. In kindergarten I the three children taking part in play without adult participation (column (1)) are 2;8 - 4;5 years of age, whereas the eight children playing in groups with adult participation (column (2)) are 4;5 - 6;9 years old. For this reason we present another comparison in Table 4. Column (1) shows the figures from ten children aged 3;7 - 7;0 occupied with role play without adult participation in several constellations of small groups. Column (2) contains the figures from six of the same children and two other children playing various role plays in which the preschool teacher took part. Columns (3) - (4) show the results from construction play (cf. Table 3, column (1) - (2)).

It appears that whereas the two kinds of play activity do not affect the communicative values very much, there are considerable differences between the distributions of utterance functions in columns (1) and (3) of Table 4: during role play without adult participation the children made

more utterances with intellectual, instructional, social-emotional and dialogue-supporting functions than they did during construction play without adult participation. It can be argued that this means that role play gives rise to a better use of language because in general, corresponding differences have been found between older and younger children (or between children who take part in communication more actively and children who are less skilled speaker-listeners).

However, there are only small differences between columns (2) and (4) in Table 4. Thus, adult participation seems to influence the use of language differently according to the kind of play activity. This deserves a closer look. Table 5 shows the distributions of utterance functions for three older children and one younger during role play with and without teacher participation. Child 5 is generally a poor speaker-listener. Compared with other children of six years, she is less inclined to take part in verbal interaction, and she is seldom answered or addressed by playmates. However, Tables 5 and 6 show no systematic variation according to age or communication skill, with the exception of the fact that the total numerical difference between the two distributions per child decreases from left to right in Table 5. Thus the suggestion that the effect of adult participation depends upon the kind of play activity is not contradicted.

The right side of Table 4 deals with utterances made by individual children during comparable episodes. Children 10 and 11 were 4;5 and 3;7 years old, and they often played together although child 10 had poor communications skills. Using the criteria for pragmatic disorders put forward by McTears (1985), he lacked attention-getting devices, and he also had problems with respect to turntaking and the establishment of reference. He often showed an inappropriate or irrelevant use of language, a restricted range of speech acts, and a low ability to repair conversational breakdown.

Tables 4 and 7 show that child 11 had a greater number of instructional, socialemotional and dialogue supporting utterances and less instrumental and directing utterances than child 10. Thus, with the exception of intellectual utterances, the general tendencies of good vs. poor communication are also found here. However, the difference between the children is not reflected by the formal quality of their utterances; in fact, child 10's utterances are longer than those of child 11.

With respect to teacher participation, child 10 is during construction play (columns (6) - (7) in Table 4) less affected than child 11 during role

TYPE OF ACTIVITY	ROLE PLAY		CONSTRUCTION PLAY		ROLE PLAY	CONSTRUCTION PLAY		ROLE PLAY		CONSTR. PLAY			"TEACHING"	
TEACHER	ABSENT	ACTIVE	ABSENT	ACTIVE	ABSENT	ABSENT	ACTIVE	ABSENT	ACTIVE	ABSENT	ABSENT		ACTIVE	
SPEAKER(S)	CHILDR.	CHILDR.	CHILDR.	CHILDR.	No.10	No.10	No.10	No.11	No.11	No.11	No. 8	No.14	No.14	Teacher
COLUMN	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
COMMUNICATIVE VALUE														
- answers & answered (1)	33	27	21	20	21	12	14	14	28	28	18	46	58	28
- answers (2)	18	20	16	18	18	11	17	14	8	21	20	21	18	27
- answered (3)	12	18	12	12	7	16	8	18	12	14	28	4	17	21
- neither-nor (4)	24	12	23	16	16	12	14	22	8	7	30	7	8	12
- private (5)	23	24	28	27	28	46	46	21	41	30	4	21	8	8
UTTERANCE FUNCTION														
- intellectual	12	18	11	18	18	7	8	7	14	8	14	10	28	14
- instructional	18	8	5	7	11	4	2	14	4	4	34	1	2	48
- social-emotional	28	18	21	20	15	18	8	22	15	21	17	13	18	11
- directing-instrumental	18	18	27	18	18	28	22	17	21	22	11	8	8	12
- dialogue supporting	11	15	7	12	17	1	10	12	15	11	8	38	28	22
- self directing	18	22	28	28	28	45	80	27	30	22	15	18	18	8
MEAN LENGTH OF UTTERANCE	5.2	5.1	4.7	5.2	5.8	5.0	5.8	5.1	4.2	4.5	4.3	1.2	1.5	4.8
NUMBER OF UTTERANCES	2300	1012	398	1004	82	75	137	147	78	127	296	184	170	183

Table 4. Some results from groups of children and individual children respectively in daycare centre 1.

Child No:	3		4		5		11	
Age	6;5		6;8		6;6		3;7	
Adult participation	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes
Utterance function:								
- intellectual	10	15	11	15	15	21	7	14
- instructional	17	14	6	14	11	23	14	4
- social-emotional	29	11	26	11	38	21	23	15
- instrum.-directing	17	22	30	22	12	14	17	20
- dialogue supporting	8	15	15	15	7	2	13	15
- self directing	13	22	12	22	14	16	27	30
Total numerical diff.	47		48		44		34	
N	351	179	144	163	168	43	147	79

Table 5. Four children from kindergarten I. The distributions of utterances (%) in role play without and with adult participation.

Children	all	No. 3	No. 4	No. 5	No. 11
Utterance function:					
- intellectual	+	+	+	+	+
- instructional	-	-	++	++	--
- social-emotional	--	--	--	--	--
- instrumental		+	--		+
- dialogue supporting	+	+		-	+
- self directing	+	++	++		+

Table 6. The impact of teacher participation upon utterance function during role play, cf. Table 5 and Table 4, columns (1) and (2).
+ & -: increase & decrease 3-7 %
++ & --: increase & decrease at least 8 %.

Activity	Role play Adult absent	Constr. Adult absent	Constr. Absent Active	Role play Absent Active
Child	No. 10 No. 11	No. 10 No. 11	No. 10	No. 10
Utterance function:				
- intellectual	-			+
- instructional	+			--
- social/emotional	++	+	-	--
- instrumental		-	-	+
- dialogue supporting	-	++	++	+
- self directing		--	+	+

Table 7. Right: The impact of teacher participation upon children 10 & 11, cf. Tables 4 & 6. In the colums on the left child 11 is compared with child 10 (cf. Table 4):

play (columns (8) - (9)), but with the exception of instrumental utterance functions, there are no incongruences.

It must be pointed out here that child 10 did not usually take part in role play, because the other children did not want him to join them, claiming that he did not know how to do it. However, when the teacher persuaded him to engage himself in a dramatic play with child 11, his 'communicative values' as well as his use of utterance functions improved. As shown in column (5) of Table 4, he produced a greater number of proper communicative and fewer private utterances, and he had more intellectual, instructional and dialogue supporting, and fewer instrumental and directing utterance functions during this "teacher initiated role play without teacher".

Finally, in Table 4 we also present some observations of certain episodes of 'teaching', ie. episodes during which the preschool teacher or an older child, child 6, tried to stimulate the youngest one in the group, child 14, to speak and take part in the interaction. Although his linguistic, pragmatic and social skills were rather poor, it appears (columns (12) - (13) that the close attention of a mature partner made him speak quite well. It must be mentioned that utterances with 'intellectual' functions in no way necessarily deal with intellectual matters, and that

'dialogue-supporting' utterances very often consist in saying "yes" or "no" appropriately. Nevertheless, it is clear that child 14 did act as a speaker-listener and performed various speech acts. Table 8 shows how the teacher accommodates her speech when she teaches child 14.

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Utterance functions	"Teaching"	All episodes
Intellectual	14	18
Instructional	40	32
Social-emot.	11	13
Directing	13	17
Dialogue supp.	22	20
Mean length	4.6	6.5
N	183	862

Table 8. The teacher in kindergarten 1 (in percentage).

It is also interesting to see that although child 6 did not differ much from the teacher with respect to utterance functions (columns (11) and (14) in Table 4), the teacher made child 14 use more intellectual and social-emotional, and fewer dialogue supporting utterances than did child 6. This may be due to the fact that the preschool teacher was more inclined to accommodate her utterances to the actual interests of child 14 than the older playmate was. On the other hand, child 6 spontaneously appreciated that child 14 fell in with the rather primitive symbolic play which she tried to introduce (cf. Vedeler 1985, ch. 9).

Language of learning and teaching in preschools.

In summary, this preliminary analysis suggests that, from a communicative and functional point of view, young children's use of language depends upon (1) the kind of play activity and (2) the participation of the pro-

school teacher and her use of language, which undoubtedly reflects her attitudes and personality. Thus some teachers are more inclined to take part in role play and even to initiate and further that kind of play than other teachers.

We have maintained that frequent use of intellectual, instructive, social-emotional, and dialogue-supporting utterances (cf. Table 1) means a better use of language and so a higher communication skill. This may appear inappropriate since the evaluation of a person's use of language must take the context into account. Thus in some situations it is extremely relevant to direct another person's behaviour and in other situations it is relevant to support and plan one's own behaviour.

However, our observations have shown that, in general, frequent use of the four types in connected with more active participation in the interaction of a play group, and they have also shown that, in general, role play gives rise to these kinds of speech acts, and implies a higher proportion of communicative utterances. This in understandable because, during role play, children have to interact, and they have to change speaker position very often, as they sometimes 'are' other persons (eg. the father, the nurse, the hunter), and sometimes are themselves, stating what is going on and so creating a fictive context for the play (eg. the father now leaves the home, that the nurse must call the doctor, or that the hunter follows the track of a bear). Furthermore, at other times they suspend the role play and talk about other things, solve social problems of disagreement within the group, etc.

Although such activities cannot be called 'teaching', they may well be educational and, in any case, they imply 'learning', ie. learning about language, communication and interpersonal relationships as well as about the professions, localities, events, etc., that are objects for the dramatizations. Our observations suggest so far that young children, and children with poor communication skills, improve their use of language and their social behaviour through role play.

As concerns the language of preschool teachers, two main types may be distinguished: a language of teaching and a language of ordinary adult-child communication. The former may be further divided into a language of proper teaching to be used when the children are taught about various things and a language of language training to be used deliberately for language stimulation (cf. Table 4 column (14)).

However, children clearly develop their linguistic and communicative skills as they take part in ordinary communication with teachers and

playmates. Our observations suggest that the analysis of utterance functions may reveal differences between teachers as to how they communicate when they participate in the play of the children. These differences may turn out to be connected with a differentiation between language of teaching and language of communication on the part of the individual teacher. On the part of the children, these differences in teacher speech may well be important for the development of independent thinking.

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