

WH-QUESTIONS IN MALAY CAREGIVER-CHILD INTERACTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This preliminary study aims to describe the usage of Wh-questions in the interaction between 12 dyads of caregivers and children aged between 4 to 6 years old. We describe children's response to caregivers' usage of Wh-questions. A 10-minute language sample is selected from a 30-minute recording of free play for each dyad in therapy room, using video and audio equipment. Data collected was then transcribed into orthographic Malay. Our results showed that caregivers directed more questions to girls than to boys. Caregivers' and children's mean percentages for usage of Wh-questions of all questions were 38.13% and 45.32% each. Caregiver used more of yes/no questions and questions with raised intonation. Children's age and gender did not affect the frequency of usage of Wh-questions. Caregivers and children used 11 and 6 types of Wh-questions respectively. Both caregivers and children used the same 4 types of Wh-questions most, which consist of 'apa', 'mana', 'kenapa' and 'macam mana'; in the descending order. 'Apa' questions occupied 63.63% of all caregivers' Wh-questions and 42.59% of all children's Wh-questions. Caregivers used 'apa' questions to: 1) obtain names of objects, story characters or actions at the scene of interaction; 2) obtain description of objects or pictures; and 3) obtain answers based on children's knowledge and experience. Types of Wh-questions used by both caregivers and children were affected by children's age. Children responded mostly in verbal form (36.15%), followed by physical form (13.25%) and combinations of verbal and physical forms (8.43%). A total 36.15% response was not able to be recorded for two reasons: 1) children did not respond to caregivers' questions; and 2) caregivers did not wait for children to respond after asking questions. Factors affecting usage of Wh-questions in caregiver-child interactions were also discussed.