Abstract: Communication is the main goal of learning a foreign language. It includes asking and answering questions which require interactive activity among the speakers. Sztutowicz (2012:141-166) in her study *Researching Oral Production Skills of Young Learners* stated that children are still developing their lexical and grammatical knowledge of language. They accept utterances in foreign language as ‘unanalysed chunks’. Her research on whether the fourth year of primary school students in Poland are ready to involve in conversation using English revealed that all of the children were able to fulfill the ‘answering question’ task successfully, but not for asking question part. Student’s motivation also proved to bring impacts on the number of words produced. However, many teachers sometimes are not sure which of speaking activities suitable for their young learners. As mentioned by Pinter (2006:56-59) that interactive tasks require careful selection and preparation. Therefore, the writer intends to propose speaking materials for young learners which include semi-structured speaking games and public speaking programs. It comprises asking and answering questions, describing things and explaining procedures which are expected to gradually develop young learners’ automaticity and fluency in speaking English as a foreign language.

Keywords: material development, speaking skills, young learners

Communicative language ability

There are two major challenges faced by young learners when they learn to communicate in a foreign language. First, that they are still developing their lexical and grammatical knowledge due to the limited exposure of the foreign language both in and outside the school. Second, young learners are also still developing the awareness of their utterance’s clarity to other people, and also learning how to ask for clarification itself (Cameron, 2001:52). Nevertheless, parents and also the school curriculum itself somehow ‘demand’ young learners to be able to communicate (both in oral and written) using the foreign language they are learning.

According to Bachman and Palmer (2010:44), there are two components for language ability, namely language competence and strategic competence. Language competence refers to the existing organizational knowledge in language users’ mind. Young learners’ language competence is restricted to individual lexical items which represent all the language knowledge they have at certain time. Strategic competence refers to higher-order metacognitive strategies that provide a management function of the language use. The integration of topical knowledge, affective schemata, language competence and strategic competence is essential for the language users to create and to interpret discourse in appropriate ways. Dealing with young learners, age-appropriate interactive tasks are relevant to provide evidence of their emerging language ability.

Interactive speaking tasks

Real, authentic language which closely linked to the classroom experience is an essential aspect to be included when we deal with speaking tasks for young learners. As noted by Cameron (2001:31), there are four aspects should be considered when design classroom tasks for children learning a foreign language. The tasks should (a) have some coherence and unity for the learners, (b) have meaning and purpose, (c) have a beginning and end, and, (d) involve learners actively. Moreover, McKay (2006:186) suggested that some visual support such as pictures, objects or body language to be provided to make the tasks appropriate and useful for the children. Tuning-in activities are to be included to make the children build awareness on the language to be used. Structured tasks which are closely supported by the adult are also more assessible for children. Simple
question-and-answer tasks, oral interviews, mini-dialogues and role play, and oral information gap tasks are examples of activity suitable for speech tasks for children which can be used as both games in the classroom and also for assessment purposes. Teacher can select some of children’s audio-recorded performance to be analysed.

Teaching children to speak

Teaching speaking of a foreign language to young learners is certainly challenging for teachers due to some reasons. First, children need extensive reinforcement to develop their oral skills, while often this is not sufficiently fulfilled only from the interaction at school. Second, while learning to communicate using the foreign language, at the same time children are also still developing their communicative skills in their mother tongue. As therefore mentioned by Pinter(2006:56-59) that interactive tasks require careful selection and preparation. Teacher’s perspective, the needs to expand children’s lexical knowledge, finding the right time to introduce more interactive activities, and how to increase learners’ interest in participating in meaningful communicative tasks are challenges to be faced by young learners’ teachers. They also need to understand the stages of development of their learners.

Piaget’s stages of development

According to Piaget’s stages of development as cited in Pinter (2011:9), there are four different stages in which children go through dealing with their thinking skills. Each stages reveals specific characteristics as follows:

- **Stage 1 (0-2 years old): sensori-motor stage;** repetitive motor habits, goal-oriented behaviour, active curiosity, imitation, object permanence.
- **Stage 2 (2-7 years old): pre-operational stage;** animism, egocentrism, centration. Children on this stage enjoy and would effectively participate in simple repetitive games or activities where the same scenario is acted out over and over again. Moreover, due to their centration matter, they then can focus only on one aspect of the task at a time.
- **Stage 3 (7-11 years old): concrete operational stage;** operational thought, using analogy competently, full emergence of symbolic thought, reversibility and conservation, appreciating causality, development of hierarchical classification, de-centration, a gradual loss of/decline in egocentrity, relational logic. Children on this stage are developing and improving their spatial awareness, i.e. understanding of distance, maps and direction. Their social skills are also developing which enable them to start to work in pairs or groups. These children can answer questions and discuss problems merely on concrete examples and objects in real life.
- **Stage 4 (11-12 years old and beyond): formal operational stage;** formal operational thought, hypothetico-deductive reasoning, thinking like a scientist, rational, systematic and abstract thinking. Children on this stage can discuss and evaluate problems without refering to the real world due to the condition that they have developed their abstract thinking skills. Usually these children enjoy in generating creative ideas.

Total Physical Response (TPR)

Dealing with principles how children learning their first language is closely related to Asher’s Total Physical Response (TPR) theory. Asher, as noted by Browns (2007:30), mentioned that children do alot of listening before they speak, and that the listening activity is accompanied by physical response (reaching, grabbing, moving, looking, etc.). Asher also emphasized that learning language for children is supposed to be stress-free, where learners would not feel overly self-conscious and defensive. TPR correlates with a great deal of listening and acting, and emphasized on the imperative form where no verbal response was necessary. TPR therefore was especially effective in the beginning levels of language proficiency.

Behaviourism theory

One of the theories related to how children acquire their first language is behaviourism proposed by Skinner. He explained, as mentioned in Lightbown and Spada (2011:10), that when children imitated the language produced by those around them, they got positive reinforcement (in the form of praise or successful communication). This would then encourage them to continue imitating and practicing the sounds and patterns until they formed habits of using the correct language. Therefore, sufficient quantity and quality of the language added with consistent reinforcement in the environment would be expected to shape children’s language behaviour. Teachers or adults should put the imitation and practice as the primary processes in language development of the children.

Principles of teaching children

Brown (2007:101-104) proposed some guidance dealing with teaching young learners. Teachers should use authentic meaningful language, meaning that it should centered on the here-and-now, functional purpose of language. Due to the short attention spans of young learners for something boring, useless or too difficult
materials or activities require teachers to create interesting, fun and meaningful activities for the children. Another specific characteristics with young learners is that they like animated, lively and enthusiastic activities with a sense of humor along. They need to have all five senses stimulated which can be fulfilled with physical activity, hands-on activities, sensory aids and also non-verbal language. Brown also emphasized that teachers should elicit as much oral participation as possible to build the children’s self-esteem.

**Principles of teaching speaking to children**

Another valuable guidelines related to teaching speaking to children was proposed by Paul (2003:76-81). He mentioned some strategies teachers need to focus on to prepare children to communicate in English. First, teachers should introduce and practice patterns of language which are meaningful for children. Second, teachers should practice new patterns in combination with old patterns that the children have learnt to make them internalized it more easily. Third, teachers should give children opportunities to guess how to use patterns flexibly in different situations. Fourth, teachers should give children confidence to speak out in front of others by talking independently with other individual and to the whole class. Lastly, teachers should focus on the questions forms of new patterns so the children can ask about things they do not know.

**Semi-structured speaking activities for young learners**

By developing and conducting appropriate speaking activities for young learners, it is expected that they would gain automaticity and fluency when using English language in their speaking, especially related to simple asking and answering questions, describing something and explaining simple procedures. Brown (2007:64) defined automaticity as learning and using the language without even thinking about them. This condition can be achieved through an inductive process of exposure to language input and opportunity to experiment with output. While Nation and Newton (2009:151) refering the nature of fluency as if when the learners take part in meaning-focused activity with speed and ease without holding up the flow of talk. This involves gaining repeated practice on the same material and using the known item in a wide variety of contexts and situations. Below are some examples of the speaking activities:

1. **Throw the ball game**
   **Learning objective:** students are able to ask and answer questions using simple Wh-question types.
   **How to play:** Teacher and students stand up in a circle form facing inside. Teacher models the new pattern of the language first then throw the ball to one student and ask question using certain Wh-question. The student has to answer the teacher’s question then throws the ball to other student and asks using the modeled pattern. The activity goes on until the last students throws the ball back to the teacher and ask the question.

2. **Hachi pachi game**
   **Learning objective:** students are able to ask and answer questions using simple Wh-question types.
   **How to play:** Teacher and students set some chairs in circle or oval shape, the number of which are one less than the number of students. One student is to be excluded for a while from the group to be ‘the guesser’ while the rest of the group sit on the chair and secretly decide who will be the ‘hachi pachi’ person. The ‘guesser’ then has to ask the group one by one using Wh-questions. When the ‘hachi pachi’ child is appointed he/she has to say “Hachi pachi” as a sign for the others to move to other chair. The one who miss the chair will be the next ‘guesser’.

3. **I Spy game**
   **Learning objective:** students are able to give and to ask simple information.
   **How to play:** One student stand in front of his/her classmates while the others have to sit down and facing to the opposite direction from him/her. The student is given a moment to observe the class and choose something or someone to be talked about. He/she then say the sentence “I spy with my eyes something/someone with ........”, referring to specific characteristic of the object. The other students have to observe their surrounding and try to guess what/who it is. They can ask questions too to gain more information. The one who can answer correctly can be the next ‘spier’.

4. **Public speaking program**
   **Learning objective:** students are able to give simple information on procedure and descriptive.
   **How to run the program:** Teacher discusses with the students on what topics they want to choose for the public speaking program, e.g. art and craft, experiment, news, magic trick, story telling, poem, etc. Teacher then make a table for each students containing their names and options of the program as the example shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 4 – Public Speaking Program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>art and craft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>story telling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Each student has freedom to choose which of the topic he/she wants to perform first. The students have one week to prepare and to practice at home on their speaking. Teacher makes the schedule on when the students will perform, preferably two or three students every day, depending on the number of the students. The audience can ask questions and give comments on the performance.

**Conclusion**

Teaching speaking in English for young learners require many considerations including the learners’ stages of development, theories and principles of teaching and learning a language for children, and especially principles of teaching speaking for children. Above all, teachers need to apply appropriate interactive speaking tasks and activities for their young learners. Repetitive and fun meaningful activities need to be sufficiently exposed to children to gradually shape their language behaviour as children see the language patterns as unanalysed formulaic chunks. Hopefully by regularly experiencing the interactive semi-structured speaking activities proposed by the writer will enhance the children’s automaticity and fluency in producing the oral language in English.

**References**


**Biodata**

Rani Yusnita previously ever worked as a radio announcer, an English instructor for children and adults, and also as a kindergarten and an elementary school teacher in a bilingual school before she proceed her study in graduate program of English Language Teaching, State University of Malang in 2013. She ever attended the IB Asia Pacific Annual Conference in 2011, the National Seminar on Classroom Action Research in 2013, and also NELTAL Conference in 2014. Her interest is on researchs dealing with teaching English as ESL/EFL for young learners.