DELVING INTO SPEECH ACT
A Case Of Indonesian EFL Young Learners

Swastika Septiani, S.Pd
Semarang State University, Indonesia
email: swastikaseptiani@ymail.com

Abstract
This study attempts to describe the use of speech acts applied in primary school. This study is intended to identify the speech acts performed in primary school, to find the most dominant speech acts performed in elementary school, to give brief description of how speech acts applied in primary school, and to know how to apply the result of the study in English teaching learning to young learners. The speech acts performed in primary school is classified based on Searle’s theory of speech acts. The most dominant speech acts performed in primary school is Directive (41.17%), the second speech act mostly performed is Declarative (33.33%), the third speech act mostly performed is Representative and Expressive (each 11.76%), and the least speech act performed is Commisive (1.9%). The speech acts performed in elementary school is applied on the context of situation determined by the National Education Standards Agency (BSNP). The speech acts performed in fourth grade have to be applied in the context of classroom, and the speech acts performed in fifth grade have to be applied in the context of school, whereas the speech acts performed in sixth grade have to be applied in the context of the students’ surroundings. The result of this study is high expected to give significant contribution to English teaching learning to young learners. By acknowledging the characteristics of young learners, the way they learn English as a foreign language, the teachers are expected to have inventive strategies and various techniques to create a fun and conducive atmosphere in English class.

Keywords: TEYL, Characteristics of Young Learner, Speech Acts

I. INTRODUCTION
Language holds a significance role in the development of intellectual, social, and emotional of the language learners. It also supports the language learners to gain success in their study. In language learning, the learners are expected to get to know themselves, their culture, and the culture of others better. In addition, the students are also expected to be able to express their ideas and feelings, participate in their society, and even find and use the analytical and imaginative skills that exist within theirs.

To communicate means to understand and to express feelings, thoughts, to gain information and to develop science, technology and culture. However, in communicating with others, people do not simply uttering words or sentences. S/he is doing certain things. This is what Austin (1962) said to be called speech acts.

Within the last few years, great deals of studies have been carried out in regard to different speech acts, such as: request, apology, compliment etc. People do not merely utter words or sentences, but s/he is doing something with the words or
sentences uttered. S/he is expecting something from the hearer. Being informed of the significance of speech acts, we should be cautious while communicating with others. Therefore, this paper intends to examine the speech act.

However, the speech act in this paper is limited to the speech act applied to primary school students. Prior to discussing the students’ ability in performing the speech act, this paper will describe the Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) in Indonesia particularly.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 TEYL In Indonesia

Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) is a rapidly growing field around the world, and English education is increasingly found at the primary levels. A very fast growing of English teaching learning towards Indonesia young learners mostly happens in urban cities. Many parents send their children to play groups, kindergartens, schools or courses offering English especially designed for children.

A study on English teaching and learning at the primary school level commissioned by the Ministry of Education of Iceland and conducted in 2005 showed very positive attitudes towards learning English. A vast majority (94%) of the children in grade 5 who were surveyed felt that it was important to know English and 97% said that they enjoyed learning English at school. They also reported a number of advantages for knowing English. These included using it for communication abroad, understanding English language movies and TV programs, and for playing computer games (Lovísa Kristjánssdóttir, Laufey Bjarnadóttir, Samúel Lefever, 2006:27).

The decision to begin English at younger age is often based on enthusiasm rather than evidence that an early start does provide the expected benefits. Most people think that learning English is taught best at early age. This refers to the hypothesis “the longer the better” that by starting learning English in primary school will increase the overall time for English comprehension and in the long term will achieve a higher level of English proficiency than those starting later. Since English is viewed as one of the widely used lingua franca in the world, many parents in Indonesia, especially in urban cities, feel of privilege if their children are able to speak English.

English education in primary school in Indonesia is intended to develop language skills that are used to accompany the action or language accompanying action. English is used for interaction “here and now”. Topic of English conversation revolves around the things that exist in the context of the situation.

According to Content Standards developed by the National Education Standards Agency (BSNP) which established by Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005, English is taught affirmatively commencing from the fourth grade. The competency standard of English requires the students of fourth grade learn English in the context of classroom, the students of fifth grade need learn English in the context of
school, and the students of sixth grade have to learn English in the context of the students’ surroundings.

Nevertheless, teaching English for young learners, therefore, should be properly handled if it is to be successful. It needs highly skilled and dedicated teaching. Teachers of English for young learners have to be inventive in selecting interesting activities, and should use various techniques for short periods of time to maintain the interest level of the children in engaging the English lesson. In order to have a great success of teaching English to young learners, the teachers also need to have a full understanding on the characteristics of the young learners, the way of the young learners learn English as a foreign language.

2.2 Characteristics of Young Learner

The teaching of children has been profoundly affected by the work of Jean Piaget, who identified four stages of cognitive and affective development in childhood and adolescence. Two of the stages in developmental stage normally occur during the elementary school years (Piaget, 1963). They are as follows:

1. The stage of sensory-motor intelligence (age 0 to 2 years).
   During this stage, behavior is primarily motor. The child does not yet internally represent events and “think” conceptually, although “cognitive” development is seen as schemata are constructed.

2. The stage of preoperational thought (age 2 to 7 years).
   This stage is characterized by the development of language and other forms of representation and rapid conceptual development. Reasoning during this stage is pre-logical or semi-logical, and children tend to be very egocentric. Children often focus on a single feature of a situation at a time—for example, they may be able to sort by size or by color but not by both characteristics at once.

3. The stage of concrete operations (age 7 to 11 years)
   During these years, the child develops the ability to apply logical thought to concrete problems. Hands-on, concrete experiences help children understand new concepts and ideas. Using language to exchange information becomes much more important than in earlier stages, as children become more social and less egocentric.

4. The stage of formal operations (age 11 to 15 years or older)
   During this stage, the child’s cognitive structures reach their highest level of development. The child becomes able to apply logical reasoning to all classes of problems, including abstract problems either not coming from the child’s direct experience or having no concrete referents.

In the context of teaching learning, most people assume that children are potential in acquiring and learning a foreign language, and even they learn it more quickly than those who are learning the foreign language after puberty. Children would be acquiring language, while adults learners would be learning it. Adults learners are
usually busy learning vocabulary and grammar rules, and they attempt to apply them later to a setting in which they have something to say.

Young learners make educational gains when they are exposed to vocabulary items repeatedly in rich context. In other words, teachers shouldn’t expect that a vocabulary word taught on Monday will be remembered on Wednesday. As part of teaching repertoire, remember that a new word should reappear many times and in different situations for the next several weeks of instruction (Linse, 2006:126). In addition, in teaching children English, there are some characteristics of whom presented by Scott and Lisbeth (1992).

1. Children aged 8-10 are mature enough
2. They have a particular point of view
3. They are able to describe the difference between facts and fictions
4. They are curious of asking questions
5. They believe in what is said and the 'real' world to express and comprehend meaningful message
6. They have distinct opinions about what they like and what they dislike
7. They are open to what happens in the classroom and begin asking a teacher’s decision
8. They can cooperate with each other and learn from others

This is a concise summary of current understanding of English young learner characteristics in Indonesia.

2.3 Speech Acts

Historically, speech act theory has been useful as an ‘eye-opener’, making us see that we can do things with our words – that our words work for us in speech acts (Mey, 1993:192). People do not simply uttering words but they are doing something with their words uttered. Hurford and Heasly (1983:239) argued that words and sentences when uttered are used to do things, to carry out socially significant acts, in addition to merely describing aspects of the world.

To perform speech acts appropriately, two types of knowledge are required: sociopragmatics and sociolinguistics (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983 as cited in Uso-Juan & Martinez-Flor, 2008). The former indicates when to perform a speech act and what is appropriate in a certain condition, whereas the latter is concerned with linguistic forms related to the speech act.

Searle’s (1977:34) solution to classifying speech acts was to group them in the following macro classes: Declarations, Representatives, Commissives, Directives, Expressives

a. Declarations

Actually, this is in a way the ‘original’ category of speech acts. These are words and expressions that change the world by their very utterance, such as ‘I bet’, ‘I declare’, ‘I resign’

Example:
Delving into Speech Act
A Case of Indonesian Efl Young Learners

- I suggest you to come earlier
- They promise to send me the postcards
- We came here to help you clean the house

b. Representatives (assertives)

These are acts in which the words state what the speaker believes to be the case, such as *describing, claiming, hypothesizing, insisting, and predicting*. The problem with assertions is that they often, perhaps even always, represent a subjective state of mind: the speaker who asserts a proposition as true, does so based on his or her belief – thus, the belief may have different degrees of ‘force’

Example:
- You look prettier with your hair tied up
- I think it’s going to rain today
- The thief is someone who might bear a grudge against you

c. Directives

These speech acts embody an effort on the part of the speaker to get the hearer to do something, to ‘direct’ him or her towards some goal (of the speaker’s mostly) such as *commanding, requesting, inviting, forbidding, suggesting, etc.*

Example:
- Don’t eat in the classroom!
- Go wash the your hands!
- Do you mind giving me a glass of water?

d. Commissives

This includes acts in which the words commit the speaker to the future action, such as *promising, offering, threatening, refusing, vowing, and volunteering*. Searle calls it ‘unexceptionable’. Like directives, commissives operate a change in the world by means of creating obligation; however, this obligation is created in the speaker, not in the hearer, as in the case of the directives.

Example:
- I will not go shopping with you again
- You better watch your mouth or else!
- I promise to return your book tomorrow

e. Expressives

These speech acts express an inner state of the speaker which, insofar as it is essentially subjective, says nothing about the world. In other words, expressives include acts in which the words state what the speaker feels, such as *apologising, praising, congratulating, deploring, and regreting*

Example:
- I’m sorry for being late
- You made me proud just looking at you
• Too bad, you weren’t at the birthday party yesterday

More careful distinctions need to be made between various different types of speech act, in order to begin to make sense of this area of meaning. Therefore, the technical distinction between locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act are now begun to define. Cutting (2008:14) defined locutionary act, illocutionary force, and perlocutionary effect as follows:

a. The Locutionary Act is ‘what is said’ the form of the words uttered; the act of saying something
b. The Illocutionary Force is ‘what is done in uttering the words’, the function of the words, the specific purpose that the speakers have in mind
c. The Perlocutionary Effect is ‘what is done by uttering the words’; it is the effect on the hearer, the hearer’s reaction

Example:

1) Nico is very hungry now
   Locution : The speaker merely says that there is someone named Nico was very hungry now
   Illocution : Asserting, giving information about the hungry Nico
   Perlocution : Causing the hearer to give meal to Nico soon

2) You look prettier in red
   Locution : The speaker merely says that the hearer looks prettier wearing only red clothes
   Illocution : Asserting, suggesting, recommending
   Perlocution : Causing the hearer to change clothes into none other colour but red

3) I prefer sugar free coke
   Locution : The speaker merely says that s/he likes coke with no sugar better
   Illocution : Asserting, requesting, ordering
   Perlocution : Causing the hearer to give the speaker sugar free coke

Consider the following dialogue – associated question - taken from a textbook for sixth grade students:

Michelle : What a lovely dress do you have? Would you please tell me where did you buy it?
Amanda : I found it at half price at a department store.

Why did Michelle ask Amanda where she bought the dress

a. She wanted to buy one just like it
b. She was showing that she liked the dress
c. She wanted to know where to find nice dresses.

The sixth grade students who was assigned this task chose (a) as the correct answer. Obviously, she could not have found the ‘correct’-answer in the text. By
choosing (a) she showed that she knows how to interpret the communicative functions of utterances in context, even when this function is merely one of 'making conversation'. World knowledge, linguistic knowledge and awareness of conversational rules all play a part in the process of the interpretation here. The textbook, writer-assumed correctly that sixth graders, in their native language, of communicative competence necessary for communicative functions. The emphasis in second language teaching and learning theories has shifted in recent years from a 'grammatical' or 'structural' approach to a 'communicative' one.

2.4 Techniques

Cohen (1996:385) suggested that an important point in teaching a given speech act such as apologizing, requesting, complaining, etc. is “to arrive at a set of realization patterns typically used by native speakers of the target language, any of which would be recognized as the speech act in question, when uttered in the appropriate context”. This set of strategies is referred to as the speech act set of a specific speech act. Four main techniques suggested in teaching speech acts to young learners:

a. The Model Dialog

Through this useful technique, we can present students with examples of speech acts in use (Olshtain and Cohen, 1991). At first, students listen to a dialogue and then repeat the dialogue for several times. The students are informed the kind of speech acts they perform. Next, the students are given more dialogues without any information concerning the particular situation.

b. Role Play

This technique is very useful which can follow the model dialogue. After students have analyzed a number of dialogues in terms of their language functions, it is time to divide them in pairs and have them act out these dialogs.

c. Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

This is one of the most popular tools in interlanguage and cross-cultural pragmatics research in which students are required to do a completion exercise and provide appropriate responses to various scenarios (Cohen, 1996).

Example:

A : I feel thirsty. Do you mind giving me a glass of water?
B : ...........................................................

d. Discourse Rating Task

This type of task requires the learners to rate various responses on a continuum (e.g. unassertive to assertive, indirect to direct, or impolite to polite) based on a given scenario (Lee and McChesney, 2000).

III. METHODOLOGY

This particular study attempts to describe the students of primary school in delivering the speech act. This study relied on extant data, referring to English for young learners syllabus in the Content Standard developed by the National Education
Standards Agency (BSNP). This study will be a descriptive qualitative analysis of speech act applied in primary school level.

IV. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

As mentioned above, English is taught commencing from fourth grade. Topic of English learning activities revolves around the things that exist in the context of the situation. Therefore, the speech act must have connection with the context of situation assigned. English learning activities for fourth graders are in the context of classroom, the students of fifth grade learn English in the context of school and the students of sixth grade have to learn English in the context of the students’ surroundings.

Table 1 Speech Acts to be taught

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Context of Situation</th>
<th>Speech Acts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Fourth</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Introducing, Greeting, Commanding, Requesting, Thanking, Apologizing, Complimenting, Forbidding, Inviting, Asserting, Permitting, Agreeing, Denying,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Fifth</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Asserting, Commanding, Directing, Requesting, Introducing, Inviting, Permitting, Agreeing, Forbidding, Asserting, Directing, Comforting, Informing, Clarifying, Premising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Sixth</td>
<td>Surroundings</td>
<td>Asserting, Commanding, Directing, Requesting, Reminding, Complimenting, Asking, Comforting, Commenting, Suggesting, Responding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Sentence patterns of request speech act to be taught

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Context of Situation</th>
<th>Addressing (with/without interjection)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Fourth Classroom</td>
<td>Can you ….?</td>
<td>Must I …. ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Fifth Grade School</td>
<td>Do you mind ….?</td>
<td>Shall we …. ?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Sixth Grade Surroundings</td>
<td>Would you please ….?</td>
<td>May I …. ?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 Linguistic strategies observed
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lexical</th>
<th>Addressing [(interjection) + Vocative/Address terms]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth Grade:</strong></td>
<td>Can/ May, borrow, lend, listen, speak, read, write, clean,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sweep, open, close, come, get, turn on, turn off, raise,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sit, stand, erase, draw, please</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fifth Grade:</strong></td>
<td>Shall, mind, please, want, listen, speak, read, write, tell,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduce, describe, feel, park, borrow, clean, go, water,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study, teach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sixth Grade:</strong></td>
<td>Please, may, help, want, feel, go, give, lend, open, close,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Want, come, buy, tell, swim, shop, send, save, watch,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spend, listen, speak, read, write, wear, bath, wash, brush,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eat, drink, do, jog,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammatical</td>
<td>Interrogative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V + S + O (Can you…? / May I …?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V + S + please + Ving + S + O (Would you please…?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do + S + V + Ving + S + O (Do you mind ….?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discourse/Politeness</td>
<td>Mitigation / Hedge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Give H options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ask for H’s permission</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Speech acts applied in teaching learning English to Indonesia young learners mostly realized in the context of situation. Each grade apply different context of situation. Students of fourth grade apply the speech acts in the context of classroom, and students of fifth grade apply the speech acts in the context of school, whereas students of sixth grade have to apply the speech acts in the context of their surroundings. The result of the data is analyzed based on Searle’s theory of speech acts.

The writer found that the speech acts applied in primary school is mostly performed in Directive (41.17%), the second speech act mostly performed is Declarative (33.33%), the third speech act mostly performed is Representative and Expressive (each 11.76%), and the least speech act performed is Commisive (1.9%).

The result of this study hopefully will provide meaningful insight of how to teach English to Indonesia young learners better. The teachers are expected to have inventive strategies and various techniques to create a fun and condusive atmosphere in
English class, and to provide any means necessary to get a better result for the benefit of the Indonesia EFL young learners.

REFERENCES


