

PRAGMATIC DEVELOPMENT OF MALAYSIAN ENGLISH-SPEAKING CHINESE PRESCHOOL CHILDREN

Wong Tze Peng

This preliminary study aims to discuss the development of nine pragmatic functions and four discourse rules used by Malaysian English-speaking Chinese preschool children. Subjects consisted of 12 children between ages of two to five years old and were divided into six age groups of six months interval. An adapted pragmatic protocol was used to elicit the pragmatic functions and discourse rules in a semi-structured setting. Findings revealed that there is a general increase in the production of appropriate responses with age though the increment is not significant. The pattern of pragmatic development of subjects was predominantly similar to that of the Mandarin-speaking Malaysian Chinese children and American English-speaking Western children though variations were noted. Besides, subjects were found to master most of the pragmatic functions and discourse rules at a similar rate as the Mandarin-speaking children but at a slightly lower rate than the American English-speaking children. The patterns of pragmatic development as a function of age were also discussed.

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