

# Observing a mother interacting with her son. The importance of observation records to evaluate the child language development and act accordingly

**Autor:** Galetx Landa, Isabel (Grado en maestra en educación infantil).

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## **Abstract**

Observation is a key instrument for education professionals to get information about children in terms of their physical, intellectual (cognitive), language, social and emotional development. This article describes the observation of a six years old child within a family context to evaluate her linguistic development. Subsequently, the evaluation the linguistic evidences showed by the child are discussed and related with the language acquisition and development theories. Finally, conclusions and recommendations to the parents close the article.

**Keywords:** Childhood Education, Child Observation, Speech Assessment, Social Interactionist

**Título:** Observación de una madre interactuando con su hijo: La importancia de los registros de observación para evaluar el desarrollo del lenguaje en el niño y actuar en consonancia.

## **Resumen**

La observación es un instrumento que utilizan los profesionales de la educación para recoger información sobre el niño desde un punto de vista de su desarrollo físico, intelectual, lingüístico, social y emocional. En este artículo se muestra una observación realizada a un niño de seis años en un contexto familiar para evaluar su desarrollo lingüístico. Posteriormente, en la evaluación, se relacionan las evidencias lingüísticas que el niño muestra con las teorías de la adquisición y desarrollo del lenguaje. Finalmente, el artículo se cierra con unas conclusiones y recomendaciones para los padres.

**Palabras clave:** Educación infantil, Observación del niño, Evaluación del lenguaje, Interaccionismo social.

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## INTRODUCCIÓN

Observation is a key tool for education professionals to get information about children in terms of their physical, intellectual (cognitive), language, social and emotional development. In general, observations are going to show us objective information. Later, this information can be used to enhance our effectiveness as teachers. This mean, that we could find out: what stage the children are currently at; what level of cognitive, language, social and emotional development they have; what their needs are, what interests them; how their personalities and temperaments are, etc.

With the conclusions obtained from the observation, teachers usually can adapt materials and the environment, prepare activities, give advice to parents, etc. This actions are performed to emphasize certain child's skills and to encourage their education, happiness and wellbeing. Moreover, it is important observe and register during Childhood Education because we can detect signs of developmental delay that may require further investigation. Finally, by observing children who exhibiting problematic behaviour we can find out possible triggers that motivates this.

In this article, in spite of the fact that the child seems to have a good use of language we want to obtain objective information. Hence, the goal and justification of this article is to make an observation conducted with a 6 years old children interacting with her mother in order to asses his language development and draw conclusions.

## OBSERVATION SLIP

**Date observation:** 2nd September 2017

**Time observation:** 8 minutes

**Number of children present:** 1

**Number of adult present:** 2, his mother and me observing

**Permission obtained from:** mother

**Immediate context:** This observation took place in TC's (Target Child) bedroom after 6:00 p.m. Adult and TC are seated on the bed listening to fairy tales. Adult left the books on the bedside table and proposes that TC tells some story. At the start of the observation process, TC is lying on the bed with his head on the pillow and adult in the same position next to him.

**Brief description of the child observed:** TC is a male aged 6 years old. TC has one brother (3 years old). Every night, before going to sleep his parents tell him and his brother a story. TC enjoys reading and listening to fairy tales. In September, he started primary school. TC seems to have a high language ability .

**Aim of observation:** The aim of this process is to observe TC for a period of 8 minutes in order to assess his language development in an objective way to later be able to draw some conclusions.

**Method:** Pre-code

**Media used:** audio recorder, pen, paper

## REGISTERED OBSERVATION

A= Adult

TC= Target Child

Code	Language
A → TC	We did not tell the "Three Little Pigs story" in a long time. How about we tell it tonight?
TC → A	ok
A → TC	How do you start?
TC → A	Once upon a time, three little pigs, that that left Grandma's house and they built houses..... one was built of straw, another was built of wood and another was built of bricks.
A → TC	Each of them made their own home, right?
TC → A	Yes

A → TC	And what happened after that?
TC → A	The wolf arrived and said: "Little pig! Little pig! Open the door!"(TC's tone became sterner)
A → TC	Right!, when the little pig finished building his straw house, he went for a nap. Suddenly, the wolf arrived and smelled the pig inside the house, and his mouth started to water. "Mmmmm". So the wolf knocked at the door of the house made of straw and said...
TC → A	"Little pig! Little pig! Open the door!" (TC's tone became sterner) and, and, and
A → TC	And what did the little pig say?
TC → A	"No, No, No!
A → TC	"No, No, No! Not for all the gold in the world!"
TC → A	Then the wolf said angrily: "I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in" (TC's voice tone became sterner)
TC → A	The wolf blew the house (ffffffffffff)
A → TC	(ffffffffffff)
TC → A	and... and... the little pig ran into his brother's wood house, and the wolf went there, and little pigs didn't let him in.
A → TC	And what did the little pigs say?
TC → A	"No, No, No! Not for all the gold in the world!". and wolf said "I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in" (TC's voice became sterner). (ffffffffffff....)
A → TC	and what happened?
TC → A	the house went flying too.
A → TC	ah! the house went flying another time!!

TC → A	yes!, and the two little pigs locked themselves into the brick house... with the other little pig... and... and they didn't let the wolf in.
A → TC	And what did the wolf do?
TC → A	wolf said "I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in" (TC's voice tone became sterner). (ffffffffffff....)
A → TC	he huffed, huffed, and puffed (ffffffffffff....)
TC → A	But... but... he couldn't knock down the house.
A → TC	Why not?
TC → A	Because the house was built of bricks
A → TC	Right!! The house was strong and he couldn't break it.
TC → A	And then, the wolf went up to the roof and came in the chimney
A → TC	really?
TC → A	yes, and... and... and... and the wolf fell in the pan where was hot meal and and...
A → TC	Ah! And what happened to the wolf?
TC → A	He burned his ass and he ran away
A → TC	and they all lived happily ever after!!! Very well!! (She clapped her hands)

This observations are in accordance with the "Good Practice Principles", complies with the requirements:

- Confidentiality: observations do not include personal data of the children observed. It also includes the permission of their parents or crèche manager.
- Objectivity: observations are free of personal prejudices and interests.
- Accurate description: I recorded and took note of all TC did and said in detail.



An adult interacting with two children. (Fuente: Isabel Galetx)

## EVALUATION

The aim of this observation was to observe and record the language of TC for 8 minutes while he was telling the "Three Little Pigs story". The conversation was recorded and transcribed just as the conversation took place.

In the first place, all human languages consists of a system of 5 rules (Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, Pragmatics):

- English verbs are well conjugated in all tenses. We can see this in sentences like "wolf arrived" or "house went flying" which uses a verb in the past tense. In other sentences TC used the present tense as in "Little pig! Little pig! Open". All these evidences suggest that his speech is consistent.
- Additionally, he does not omit phonemes. The word order in sentences is properly (Subject + Verb + Complements). We can see this in sentences like: "he burned his ass" or "the wolf went up to the roof".
- In terms of the vocabulary, TC uses the vocabulary appropriate to the story of the "three little pigs" (Little pigs, wolf, straw house, wood house, brick house, etc).
- Furthermore, TC repeats expressions from the story: "No, No, No! Not for all the gold in the world!" and wolf said "I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in". TC shows a good understanding of the meaning of language .

In summary, TC's language development in term of pronunciation, syntax, semantics, morphology and pragmatics seems to be within the normal range for his age. Speech is fluent and grammatically correct. At this age children can relate a story back in sequence (Flood, E., 2013).

In the observed situation, there is a mother and a child telling a story. Some studies show that the whole-language approach works best for children who are exposed to books at home. Social context influences language use and the

communication of the children (Flood, E., 2013). This approach is consistent with Skinner's theory who believed that all learning, including language learning, occurs as a result of a reinforcement of the environment (Nurture) (Flood, E., 2013). However, Chomsky, responding to Skinner's Verbal behavior, shows that language acquisition occurs because of some innate abilities that children are endowed with. This explains how they can produce an indefinite number of utterances that they have never heard (nature) (N. Chomsky, 1959).

Social interactionists argue that the way a baby learns a language is both biological and social (That is to say nature + nurture). Interactionists believe that children are born with brains that predispose them to pick up languages as well as with a desire to communicate. However, the Interactionist theory presumes that children can only learn language from someone who wants to communicate with them (Vygotsky, L., 1978). Therefore, language development in TC is a result of both nature and nurture. TC, as many other children, has personal qualities and at the same time he has a rich environment which causes him to speak properly.

The psychologist Jerome Bruner emphasised the importance of the child's environment in language development. He believes that the adults and more able peers in a child's life provide what he calls a language acquisition support system (LASS) (Bruner, J. S., 1977). According to Bruner, in this observation we can see that adult (mother) uses strategies to support children's speech.:

TC → A	the wolf arrived and said: "Little pig! Little pig! Open the door!"(TC's voice became sterner)
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and after that the adult said:

A → TC	Right!, when the little pig finished building his straw house, he went to have a nap. Suddenly, the wolf arrived and smelled the pig inside the house, and his mouth started to water. "Mmmmm". So the wolf knocked at the door of the house made of straw and said...
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We can see that adult is recasting and expanding his speech

Finally, in this observation we can see that when TC starts the sentences he repeats words like "and, and, and ..." This is common in kids. TC is thinking what to say. It's not stuttering or anything like that.

## CONCLUSION

Currently, there is wide agreement about the existence of a series of aspects involved in the language acquisition and development; related to the relationship between language and cognition; with innate predisposition to language; and the existence of interactive processes between the child and the adult that make that acquisition possible. All these aspects have been evidenced in the present observation and in its subsequent analysis. TC is born with innate qualities that allow him to speak. This is observed in other children at the same level. However, in the process of language acquisition, interaction with the environment is very important. One of the most important factors influencing language acquisition is the dialogue between the adult and the child. For that reason, we hypothesize that TC language development level is very good for his age.

Therefore, the teachers have to prepare an educational environment that encourage the acquisition and development of language for the child. By the same token, the familiar context is equally important. In the present observation we can appreciate how TC's mother actions helped TC to improve his speech.

I would like to conclude by saying that observation is a good way to analyse certain situations like the one that has been shown in this article: “a mother interacting with her son”. From this observation we could ascertain that adults play a key role in the acquisition and favorable development of the language in the child.

### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENT

One key aspect is to make time to spend with the child after school day. So, I encourage parents to make time to sit down with their child, tell stories and discuss what happened that day in school. Child can benefit from the speech of the adult and consequently they can improve their vocabulary and language structures. Moreover, I suggest that parents should use strategies such as recasting, expanding and labelling to help children's language development.

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