

# Communication Between Parents And Their Children Who Undergo Speech Delay (A Case Study By Using Symbolical Interaction Model In Matthew In Medan)

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**Abstract:** Matthew, the oldest son of Mr. Joni and Mrs. Hani cannot speak normally although he is four years old. He will get furious by hitting his head and keeping rolling around on the floor if we do not fulfill his want. The parents have to struggle hard to make their son grow and develop normally like other normal children. Besides sending him to a Special School, they also use their own method to cure his retardation. The research used a case study by finding out the inter-personal communication between Matthew and his parents. The data were gathered by conducting in-depth interviews with the parents and observation on the communicative activity between Matthew and his parents in order to get triangulation data. The result of the research showed that 1) the paradigm used was symbolical interactions which explained the method of communication between parents and their son who underwent Speech delay, 2) the theory used in the research was the theory of effectiveness in communication, 3) The result found that family was the environment where children spent most of their time during their growth; therefore, parents should provide an favorable environment which supports their children's growth and development.

**Index Terms:** Interpersonal Communication, Parents, Child, Speech delay

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Any parents hope that their beloved child will grow and develop normally. However, their expectation is sometimes not in accordance with the reality because in the process of growing, a child will often undergo changes, either toward the better one or toward the negative one. Inconsequence, he/she will undergo certain disorders which causes him/her to need special care. Matthew who was four years old underwent difficulty in communicating with other people; he underwent Speech delay(dyslogia). This symptom had been realized by his mother, Hani, since he was two years old. At the age of two, a child usually has already had 50 words and he can at least connect 2 words. When he is 4 years old, Matthew could not use words which were indicated by his indistinct utterance, and he only used gestures in communicating with other people so that his parents and the people surrounding him hardly understood what he said although he could understand what they said to him. Before his parents realized what had occurred to him, Matthew was always given an opportunity to watch television. He seemed very serious watching the cartoon program in one of cable television channels. His mother called him several times but he still enjoyed watching the television.

One day, when he was watching television, the light went off which automatically made him cry hysterically and was eventually in tantrum. His mother began to sooth him to calm down and to stop crying. However, he always pointed at the television while he was crying without saying anything. Generally, a child with retarded speech disorder has difficulty in communicating what he wanted, either verbally (oral/speaking) or non-verbally (gestures, body movement, and in a written form) However, when observation was done in Matthew's house, it was found that even though he could not completely communicate as what a child of his age did, he had underwent advancement in communicating. Therefore, the researchers were interested in find out how the interpersonal communication was done between his parents, Mrs. Hani and Mr. Joni, and him as a child with retarded speech disorder (dyslogia).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research used a case study with qualitative approach, its analytical units were the interpersonal communication and retarded speech. The informants were determined purposively by determining a group of participants as the informants according to the criteria which were relevant to the research problems (Bungin, 2011: 107). There were three informants: Mrs. Hani, Mr. Joni, and Matthew himself. The data were gathered by conducting in-depth interviews with Matthew's parents since they played a vital role in handling the capability of his communication. Observation is aimed to obtain data about a certain problem. Guba and Lincoln (1981) in Moleong (2006: 174) point out that observation is an observable technique which enables a researcher to find out and observe by himself and takes notes on behavior and events which occur in reality and field notes to obtain triangulation data. The researchers should have created good relationship with Matthew's parents. It was necessary to do this with the informants and did not directly ask the problems they were faced so that the researchers could find out their preparation and acceptance during the interview. The purpose was to establish good relationship by finding out an atmosphere of

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mutual respect, trust, take and give, working together, and provide the feeling of security and concern. Therefore, our task was not only to obtain information but also to make the atmosphere of interview as convenient as possible. The gathered data would be analyzed by using descriptive qualitative analysis with relevant communication theory.

## RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

According to Hurlock (1978: 194-195), definition of retarded speech in a child is when the level of speech development is under the level of development quality of speech in a child of the same age, indicated from the inaccuracy in using words. There are many factors which influence retarded speech disorder. A child is considered undergoing Speech delay(dyslogia) when his age has reached two or three years but he still cannot speak normally which is indicated by indistinct utterances in communicating. He can only uses gestures so that his parents and the people in his neighborhood can hardly understand his speech although he actually can understand what other people say to him. Family/parents are the first and the main institution and personality in developing a child's growth and development. Good and planned solution will be very beneficial in helping a child be able to communicate well. Therefore, good and affectionate acceptance and treatment toward a child with retarded speech disorder will be very helpful in handling a child by his parents, teachers, and doctors. Parents understand correctly that retardation disorder in speaking in their child is in the aspect of socialization and communication so that the child will look lively in his own world and talk with himself by the words which are not distinctly understood and repeated several times. In this case, it is necessary to involve other people professionally and skillfully like teachers and specialists in autistic children. The programs at school and the procedure of handling by teachers at school should be known and understood by parents so that the programs can be continued at home directly by parents or the persons who are trusted in taking care of children. Cooperation among all stakeholders such as family members, teachers at school, and doctors is highly needed so that all forms and procedures of handling can be known and understood by parents so that they can also carry out and continue or at least repeat them at home. Parents need to understand that a retarded speech child can achieve optimal growth when he is supported by performing good, systematic, and planned handling because good handling will need transparency from parents in order to communicate their child's condition truthfully to child psychiatrists, pediatricians, therapists, psychologists, teachers at school, and their relatives so that cooperation and mutual responsibility can occur. Family is an environment where children spend most of their time during the periods of their growth. Therefore, parents should establish such a condition in which family becomes an environment which supports children's development optimally. In order to get other people's acceptance, parents and other family members should firstly accept the existence of their children. Perhaps in the beginning parents and the other family members mostly dig up information from experts about good procedure of taking care of their children, but in the end they will do their actions as the managers and executors in taking care of their children at home.

## Matthew And The Phenomena Of Retarded Speech Disorder

Matthew was firstly identified as a child who underwent speech delay when he was three months old. He was the first child of Mrs. Hani and Mr. Joni. When he was three months old, Mrs. Hani was pregnant again. As we know, until three years old, a child belongs to a child's golden period. In this period, parents should play an active role in "establishing" a child's characteristics. At the time, Matthew was three months old and he lacked of attention because his mother was pregnant. Since he was born, Matthew was considered as a nice baby. He seldom cried, slept well at night, was not a crybaby, was very friendly, and easily smiled at other people. His mother was a housewife. Although she was busy with house work, she never forgot to let him watch television. His favorite program was Tom and Jerry that used dialogs in English. When it was impossible of him to watch television, he was provided with electronic tablet with internet connection. Usually he watched YouTube. Later on, Matthew was calm down when he was in front of the television set. He would laugh by himself each time Tom was teasing Jerry, and vice versa. He would cry and get angry when the program of Tom and Jerry came to an end; the same thing also occurred with his electronic tablet. When the connection was late or the package of the internet data was expired which made the video watched by him stopped at once, he would be furious. When he reached one year old, Matthew still chattered in a language of a baby. At that time, his mother did not care because she was still focused on the birth of her second child. Matthew's little brother was born in the same month as his birth; the only difference was in the dates and years. When his younger brother was six months old, he was 18 months old and his mother began to realize that his younger brother was more communicative than he was. When he began to toddle, he walked by standing on tiptoe without stepping his knees on the floor. She thought that the floor was cold. Matthew did not want to get his feet to be cleaned up on the hairy carpet. After taking a bath, he also refused to be combed or to use blanket in his sleep even though the room was cold because of air condition. He often did not give any response when he was called; he did not like to be put on his mother's lap and embraced like other children in his age. He also rarely chattered, seldom smiled at other people who asked him to joke around. When his younger brother was six months old, his mother took him the Mother and Child Hospital in Medan to vaccinate his younger brother. After his younger brother had been vaccinated, his mother asked the pediatrician about the strangeness in Matthew's growth. To make it sure, the pediatrician said that further observation would be needed. After having been discussed with Matthew's father, they went back to the pediatrician to observe Matthew's strangeness. During the observation, he only cried, while in the outside of the room his mother filled out the form of questionnaires on the history of health, any illness which had been suffered, the history of pregnancy, and the history of his health since he was born. The result of the observation showed that he suffered from retarded speech disorder. Since his parents did not believe in the result of the observation, they took him to another Child Growth and Development Clinic to get the second opinion. The result was the same as the first observation. He underwent retarded speech disorder. Getting shocked with the result, his parents searched for a lot of information about his retarded speech. They not only

attempted to find the information from the internet but also from various books in book stores. In the beginning, they believed that if they asked him to communicate continuously, he would gradually speak normally. When Matthew was nearly two years old, he did not have any development. He still got involved in watching television and using gadgets. He would cry hysterically when he did not get what he wanted even when he was two years old he could only call his parents, "mama" or "papa." Finally, his parents decided to send him to special school for autistic children in Medan. Medically, he was not autistic; but if this retarded speech disorder was cured immediately, it would not be cured at all. The purpose was that he would have new friends who would communicate with him normally. Besides sending him to school, his parents also attempted to make him avoid watching television and using gadgets gradually and asked him to communicate with them. They admitted that this method had not been carried out since Matthews was a little child. The time for watching television began to be decreased. When he watched television, he was always accompanied while they communicated to each other. For example, his mother asked him, "What is it, dear? Is it a mouse? Please repeat, mou-se." The television program was only cartoon which used Indonesian. At the beginning of this process, he often got furious; he kept rolling around and hitting his head on the floor. At this time, his parents should have been patient and not yield. The use of gadget to watch YouTube was also reduced. The gadget was used only for watching video offline, and thus the video which could be watched was only that which was available. In order to stop using the gadget, they intentionally filled a little dry-cell battery so that he could not watch for a long time since it was non-active anymore. Even today, his parents hid the television set and he did not watch television at all. Instead, he was bought many kinds of toys and his mother always accompanied him while he was playing with them while continuously communicating with him. In the lullabies, she took turn with her husband reading stories slowly so that he would catch on the words mentioned by them. His mother also sang some songs as lullabies for him. During the observation in Matthew's house, we found that Matthew began to interact with his parents. Today, he has easily answered when his name is called. He can say "mama", "papa", "and "dek" (brother). He has also been able to ask for a drink when he was thirsty by saying "num", saying "iya" if he agreed, and saying "gak" when he did not agree or did not want. He has also been angry and kept rolling around on the floor. Of course, he still could not communicate normally like the other children in his age, but according to this parents' information, now he has showed a lot of advancement.

## DISCUSSIONS

Communication done by Matthew's parents was interpersonal communication. Onong U. Effendy defines interpersonal communication as a communication between two persons in which many direct contacts were in the form of conversation; this type of communication can be directly done by face to face conference and through the medium like telephone. The characteristic of interpersonal communication is two-way or reciprocal communication (Effendy, 1993: 61). Meanwhile, De Vito (in Liliweri, 1991: 13) defines interpersonal communication as the sending of messages from a person and they are received by another person or a group of persons by direct reciprocal feedback. It was intensely carried out by

Matthew's parents toward him in the hope that he could practice to speak and to respond to other people's talking. The theory used in this research was the theory of symbolic interactionism. George Herbert Mead is regarded as the pioneer of the symbolic interactionism movement. It is a movement in sociology which is focused on the ways human beings establish meaning and structure in the society through conversations. Barbara Ballis Lala (in Littlejohn, 2008: 231-237) summarizes the basic idea of this movement as follows:

1. Human beings make decisions and act according to their subjective understanding on a situation when they find their own identity;
2. Social life consists of the processes of interaction of structure which always change;
3. Human beings understand their experience through meanings which are found in symbols of their first group, and language is an important part of social life;
4. The world is established from social objects which have names and meanings which are determined socially;
5. Human actions are based on their interpretation in which objects and actions in a situation which is considered and given meaning;;
6. A person's self is a significant object and which, like all social objects, is known through social interaction with other people.

Symbolic interactionism contains the core of general thought about communication and society like what is explained by Jerome Manis and Bernard Meltzer (Sobur, 2000: 194-204) who separate seven basic premises which are theoretical and methodological of symbolic interactionism as follows:

- 1) People can understand various things by learning from experiences. A person's perception is always translated in.
- 2) Various meanings which are learned through interaction among people. The meaning appears from the existence of the changes in symbols in social groups.
- 3) All social structures and institutions are created from the existence of interactions among people.
- 4) A person's behavior is not absolutely determined by the events which existed in the past; it is done intentionally.
- 5) Thought consists of an internal conversation which reflects interaction occurred between one person and the other one.
- 6) Behavior is formed or created in social groups during the process of interaction.
- 7) We cannot understand a person's experience by only observing his behavior. A person's understanding on various things should be known.

The essence of symbolic interactionism is an activity which is a human specific characteristic: communication or the exchange of symbols which are given meaning. It was the one which was carried out by Matthew's parents toward him. Interpersonal communication was carried out in order that it could be easier for him to communicate with other people, for basically his parents fully realized that in the past they did not do anything to help him so that his behavior seemed to own his own world and rarely interacted with other people. Interaction which was carried out by Matthew's parents was also aimed to practice his perception and meaning on certain events so that in the future he was expected to able to be independent in his social life. Symbolic interactionism carried out by Matthew's parents was aimed to make it "real" by the

existence of interaction between Matthew and them and to make their social world meaningful. The theory of symbolic interactionism emphasizes on a strong relation between symbols and interaction. From this statement, it can be known that individuals are active participants and reflective toward their own social world. They are triggered to act according to the meaning they give for humans, objects, and events. Meanings are created in good language which is used in communication with other people or with their own self. Language gives an opportunity for individuals to develop their feelings about self and to interact with other people in the social life. In the process of Matthew's recovery, there is also the theory of the effectiveness of interpersonal communication which begins with five general qualities which are considered; they are openness, empathy, supportiveness, positivity, and equality (Devito, 1997).

- 1) Openness - Matthew's parents always attempted to be open or transparent toward him in order to encourage his openness toward them. His habit of crying for asking something began to decrease; it changed to telling what he wanted verbally. This small thing showed his openness toward his parents
- 2) Empathy - Henry Backrack (1976) defines empathy as "...a person capacity to "find out" what other people experience in a certain time, from their point of view, and through their perception." Matthew's father told us that Matthew had recently asked him why his younger brother cried. Matthew wanted to know the reason why his younger brother cried. From this incidence, it was revealed that he began to show his feeling of empathy, and he began to show his curiosity.
- 3) Supportiveness - One shows his supportiveness by behaving a) descriptively and not evaluative, b) spontaneously and not strategically, and c) professionally and not the feeling of certainty. Matthew's parents always showed their supportiveness toward him. For example, when he was playing Lego, they always gave their support by giving their applause when he was successful in arranging the Lego.
- 4) Positivity - In every incidence when Matthew had showed his capability of interacting with other people, his parents would show their positive attitude in order to motivate him.
- 5) Equality - In every opportunity, perhaps there was inequality; for example, in Matthew's school there were many of his friends who had showed advancement in communication, compared with Matthew. However, his parents never compared him with his friends. They showed their attitude that he was equal to his friends at school. Equality means that we accept other people's condition, or, according to Carl Rogers, equality needs us to give "unconditional positive appreciation" to other people.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis which had been explained above, it could be concluded about Interpersonal Communication Between Parents And Their Retarded Speech Child as follows:

- 1) The handling of retarded speech children by their parents at home was preceded by consulting with doctors and psychologists, and attempted to search for information from internet and finally, in academic field, the child should be sent to the Special School for autistic children.
- 2) Parents and other family members realized that their child suffered from retarded speech disorder so that he had difficulty or retardation in performing reciprocal relation or interaction with other people, including in keeping in touch with his peers. He liked to be aloof from other people and busy with his own world. Disorder in the aspect of

- communication had caused him to have Speech delay (dyslogia); he got difficulty in completing with other people in communication and showed his repetitive behavior, or
- 3) Parents' pattern or method in communicating with their child at home was through exercises in compliance, followed by eye contact through each procedure. When these two things occurred, the child would be given a reward like compliment or embrace, caressing, and followed by reciting letters or alphabet or asking his name, what he was doing, or asking him to sing together with short lyrics. In the academic field, the child was taught to write, read, and calculate. When he was successful in these things, he would be given a reward like compliment.
  - 4) Family is an environment where a child spends most of his time during the growing period. Therefore, parents should realize that a family can become an environment which supports a child's growth and development.

## SUGGESTIONS

1. Interpersonal communication with a child with retarded speech disorder (dyslogia) can be studied deeply by consulting his teachers at school about his interpersonal communication.
2. The same study can also be consulted with any parents who have successful in "curing" their child who has had retarded speech disorder.

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