Linguistic creativity in the school setting: A case study of Indonesian children's verbal language play in an international elementary school

Rafista Deviyanti[1] , Khairun Nisa[2]
[1,2] English Language Study Program, University of Lampung, Bandar Lampung City, Indonesia
Correpondence Author: rafista.deviyanti@fkip.unila.ac.id

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the verbal language play production of two Indonesian children studying at Rainbow Junior International School in Bali. The study aimed to explain how language play functioned as input for the children's English language learning within the natural language environment of the school. Two second-grade students, Didi and Rosie, were observed for 22 days during their interactions with peers and teachers. The findings revealed that the subjects produced a significant amount of language play. The study suggests that providing children with support and exposure to language play can encourage metalinguistic awareness and language growth.

Keywords: language play, language acquisition, case study, children

Introduction

The role of language play in child development has long been a topic of interest for researchers. Language play, defined as the creative and playful use of linguistic elements, is a ubiquitous feature of child language acquisition across diverse cultural contexts (Crystal, 1998). Through engaging in activities like rhyming, jokes, and experimenting with the sounds and structures of words, children actively explore the boundaries of their linguistic knowledge and capabilities (Berk, 2013; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 1991). This linguistic creativity not only cultivates important language skills, but also serves as a window into children's cognitive development and sociocultural experiences (Garnica, 1977; Pellegrini & Galda, 1993).

Although language play is recognized as a significant aspect of child language acquisition, much of the existing research on this topic has focused on adult language learners (Kramsch and Sullivan 1996; Lantolf 1997; Sullivan 2000 as cited in Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005) or the role of the teacher in facilitating such play (Van Dam, 2002 as cited in Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005). Furthermore, the existing body of research has been predominantly conducted in Western,

English-speaking contexts. Consequently, there is a lack of understanding about the forms and functions of language play among children from non-Western, multilingual backgrounds.

To address this gap in the literature, the present case study aims to explore the verbal language play production of Indonesian children attending an international elementary school. By investigating the linguistic creativity of this understudied population, the study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of language play in child language development across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts.

Theoretical background

Language play

Language play has been identified as nonscripted, creative and interactive vocalizations in the context of play (Corbett and Prelock: 2006). More precisely, it can be defined as the manipulation of linguistic elements such as sounds, words, syntax, meaning, and even pragmatics for the purpose of amusement, imagination, language learning, and the verification of reality (Crystal: 1996, Cook.: 2000).

This form of linguistic creativity has been posited to serve as a tool for language acquisition (Cook, 2000). As language play has been proven that it is helpful for first language acquisition, some studies also found that language play may be helpful for L2 acquisition. Lantolf (1997) outlined in very specific terms the role that language play as private speech may perform in the process of L2 acquisition. He focused on studies documenting the contributions to the L2 learning of behaviors, mentally answering questions, mentally correcting errors of others, note-taking, or loudly rehearsing while studying alone. Lantolf suggested that the function of language play in L2 acquisition is to provide learners with the opportunity to compare their existing interlanguage (IL) systems. Several studies have documented spontaneous language play during the L2 acquisition of adults (Kramsch and Sullivan, 1996; Sullivan, 2000), it has been discovered that private language rehearsal, that is, private language play is an important feature of learners' acquisition of a second language (in Cekaite and Aronsson, 2005).

Language play can be seen as a pedagogical tool that is intrinsically motivating and facilitates L2 learning. It not only encourages students to expand their vocabulary, but it also provides authentic language use situations. On a theoretical note, language play can thus be seen as an important element in language learning. The argument is that language play provides a context within which children can reinforce their knowledge of linguistics units (e.g., sounds and words) and structures (e.g., syntax), while also affording them greater freedom to

experiment with and emphasize the functional role of these elements within the communicative system. The fictional or nonsensical worlds created through language play, in particular, are believed to offer children opportunities to more flexibly practice and consolidate their developing linguistic competencies (Cook, 2000). He also posits that the fictional world or nonsense created by language play allows practicing children more freedom to manipulate these linguistic forms which emphasize their functional role in the communication system.

Child second language play

Research has shown that language play can positively influence second language acquisition. Peck (1980) proposed that ludic language play creates opportunities for practice and enhance the affective climate, which supports language learning. In a year-long ethnographic study of two native English-speaking children acquiring German, Bongartz and Schneider (2003) also linked language play to increased practice opportunities, and, consequently, linguistic development. Their findings suggested that language play encourages learners to focus on linguistic form, and offering opportunities to practice using specific language forms, which can indirectly facilitate acquisition. Similarly, Aronsson and Cekaite (2005) found that language play led to focus on form, peer correction, practice, and "pushed output" – all of which contribute to language learning. In a study of children's language play in a classroom setting, Broner and Tarone (2001) observed that children engaged in phonological, morphological, and semantic language play, often experimenting with sounds, structures, and the creation of imaginary worlds. All that research indicates that children's language play can positively impact second language acquisition through various mechanisms, such as providing practice opportunities, encouraging attention to linguistic form, and fostering an engaging, supportive learning environment.

Study context

This study was conducted in an international school in Bali, Indonesia. The school did not follow Indonesian national curriculum; instead, it used international curricula managed by the International Baccalaureate (IB) organization. This allowed the school to offer a globally recognized, academically rigorous. Most students in this school were not Indonesian; they were children of the staff or international business, international organizations, and missionary programs based in Bali. These students came from diverse cultural and linguistic background, enriching the school's multicultural environment. However, there were also some Indonesian children studying at the school, providing an opportunity for cross-cultural exchange and interaction. English was the medium of instruction, used both in the classroom and outside of it. Teachers were required to be fluent in English, and many were native or near-native speakers, ensuring high-quality English language instruction.

Research question

The present study investigated the language play produced by Indonesian students. Specifically, this study aimed to address the following question:

> *What types of language play are produced by Indonesian children in an elementary international school, which serves as a natural language environment context?*

Method

Research design

This study used an intrinsic case study design. Methodologically, it was a participant-observation case study. The researcher as key instrument collected data in the field at the sites where the subjects produce language play. Utterances were taken down as they occurred naturally without special efforts in elicitation. Some elicitation did occur as a natural part of conversation since the researcher was also a participant in the setting. Data was collected from the children's conversation for 5 weeks.

Participants

The data were collected in an elementary international school, from students in second grade, who were aged 7 to 8 years. The main participants (Didi and Rosie, pseudonyms) were Indonesian students, while the other four participants (one girl and three boys) were from different nationalities. All the children spoke English when interacting with others, both teachers and peers. For the Indonesian participants, English was their second language. Some of the other children were native English speakers or used English as their second language. Pseudonyms have been used to maintain the participants' confidentiality.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researchers sought permission from school headmaster to conduct the research, explaining the nature and objectives of the study. After receiving approval from the headmaster, the researchers then obtain parental consent, again outlining the purpose and procedures of the investigation. Data were collected over a five-week period, during which the participant students' classroom interaction and play activities were audio and video recorded. However, the use of audio and video recording equipment was not entirely effective, as the researchers found that the presence of recording devices sometimes distracted the participants from their natural behaviors. Consequently, the researchers relied more heavily in detailed fieldnotes.

Observations were carried out at the school from Monday to Friday for the duration of the five-week data collection period. Each child participant was

observed during both instructional time and free play periods, including snack times and other classroom activities. Given that the lead researcher also served as a teaching assistant, they were able to integrate seamlessly into the school setting, occasionally participating in the children's activities and conversations. Because at least one teacher or teaching assistant accompanied the students during outdoor play, the children appeared unperturbed by the researcher's presence.

The observational data collected included both structured and unstructured activities. Detailed fieldnotes were taken and later transcribed into a comprehensive written record. Following the observational phase, the researcher informally interviewed the participants about their activities, family background and home habits.

Results and discussion

The observations discussed below were recorded over the 22-day school term. Two student participants, Didi and Rosie (pseudonyms), were the primary focus of the researcher's fieldwork, which entailed following the children both within the classroom setting and during outdoor play periods. The lead researcher assisted the classroom teacher, enabling close monitoring of the participants' movements, interactions, and conversations.

Within the classroom environment, the children consistently incorporated playful elements into their behaviors and activities, regardless of the task or situation. Play appeared to be an integral, inseparable component of the participants' daily experiences. While sometimes the children played individually with toys, on other occasions they engaged in group play. Notably, Didi and Rosie, who were Indonesian students attending the Rainbow Junior international school, conversed primarily in English with their predominately native English-speaking peers. However, Didi, along with several other students whose English proficiency was still developing, received supplementary English lessons aimed at strengthening their linguistic skills. Despite these linguistic challenges, both Didi and Rosie demonstrated the ability to manipulate language in creative, playful ways.

Within the busy, complex social environment of the classroom, where multiple parallel activities were often occurring simultaneously, securing the attention of one's peers was not a given. The children, including the two focal participants, often employed joking, mocking, and other forms of language play as strategies for garnering the attention and engagement of their co-participants. Didi and Rosie's language play took various forms, such as producing playful nonsense variations of words, simple puns, jokes, mockery, and riddles, as well as chants containing linguistic play. Both the student participants and their

teachers frequently initiated these spontaneous, humorous linguistic interactions, which frequently involved playful mislabeling, puns, and the exploitation of linguistic ambiguity, phonological, semantic, and syntactic features.

Table 1. The number and percentage language play production

No.	Category of language play	The number of language play production
1	Phonological play	28
2	Morphological play	15
3	Semantic play	14
4	Pragmatic play	13
5	Combination play	18
	Jumlah	88

An analysis of the linguistic data collected over the 22-day observation period at Rainbow Junior school revealed that the two focal participants, Didi and Rosie, produced a total of 88 instances of language play (see Table 2). As shown in the data, the most prevalent form of language play was sound play, accounting for 31.81% of the total instances. The second most frequent category was combination play, with 18 occurrences (20.45%). Morphological play, semantic play, and pragmatic play were observed in relatively similar frequencies, comprising 17.04%, 15.90%, and 14.77% of the total language play instances, respectively. Notably, the participants did not engage in any syntactical play during the observation period.

The frequency of language play production fluctuated across the five-week observation, with 13 instances recorded in the first week, 20 in the second week, 17 in the third week, 23 in the fourth week, and 15 in the fifth week. Additionally, a comparison of the language play production between Didi and Rosie revealed that while they were of the same age, Rosie's overall language play was more extensive than Didi's. However, in the category of phonological play, Didi's production exceeded that of Rosie's. The remaining language play categories were dominated by Rosie's contributions.

Through deeper observation and informal discussions with the participants, the differences in language play production between Didi and Rosie appear to be attributable to factors such as family background, personality, and peer influences. These findings suggest that individual and contextual variables play a significant role in shaping children's engagement with and manipulation of language in playful ways within the classroom setting.

Table 2. Subjects' Language Play Production

Categories of Language Play	Frequencies of Language Play		Percentage	
	Didi (Subject 1)	Rosie (Subject 2)	Didi	Rosie
Phonological play	19	9	21. 59 %	10. 22%

Categories of Language Play	Frequencies of Language Play		Percentage	
	Didi (Subject 1)	Rosie (Subject 2)	Didi	Rosie
Morphological Play	5	18	5. 68 %	11. 36%
Syntactical Play	0	0	0%	0%
Semantic Play	6	8	6. 81%	9. 09%
Pragmatic Play	4	9	4. 54 %	10. 22%
Combination play	5	13	5.68%	14.77%
Total	39	49	44.30%	55.66%

The observational data revealed that the two focal participants, Didi and Rosie, engaged in a variety of language play behaviors, including playful nonsense variations of words, joking, mocking, mislabeling, and simple puns. Their language play spanned multiple linguistic domains, such as phonological play (Examples 1 and 2), morphological play (Examples 3-5), semantic play (Examples 6 and 7), pragmatic play (Examples 8 and 9), and combination play (Examples 10 and 11). The following sections provide a more detailed description and illustration of the participants' language production.

Phonological Play

The present research findings indicated that phonological play was the most prevalent category observed among the various types of language play. Out of the total 88 instances of language play, 28 units (31.81%) were classified as phonological play, exhibited by both participant groups. The majority of the phonological play instances involved onomatopoeic expressions produced by Didi during his engagement in dramatic and motor play activities. Notably, Didi exhibited a higher frequency of phonological play compared to Rosie.

The following examples illustrate how the participants engaged in phonological play, or sound-based language manipulation:

London	: *bang.. bang... (*shooting Brooklyn using his toy*)*
Brooklyn	: *duaaaaar....*
Didi	: **ngeeeeng... ngeeeeng ... brrrmmm... brrrmmm... syuuuuuutt** (flying his plane)
London	: *bang... bang... I got you!* (He's now shooting Didi's plane)
Didi	: *duaaaaaarr... aaaaaaaarrrgh!! My plane fall! My plane fall! I'm die... I'm die.*
Didi	: **biip... biip...bibbib**...(shaking his plane)

<div align="right">(Example 1)</div>

In example one, Didi, Brooklyn and London played the LEGO while others were reading books and drawing some pictures. The children were allowed to play in this free time on the mat or on the chair after they had finished their works.

Didi formed a plane, London formed a pistol and Brooklyn formed a castle. London started shooting Brooklyn's castle and Didi's castle. They made a sound effect in accompanying their toy play. Didi also created sound effect when he had toy play.

> Rosie   : *baby.. baby.. baby.. ohhh*
> Chester   : *baby.. baby.. baby.. noo*
> Rosie   : *baby.. baby.. baby..babe*
> ***baby... baby... baby... babe... babe.. babe!***

<div align="right">(Example 2)</div>

In example two, Rosie sang *Justin Beiber's* song entitled '*Baby*'. She and Chester sang the refrain which was then changed by Rosie. There was actually no 'babe' in the song but Rosie creatively added it in her song. 'Baby' and 'babe' actually share the same meaning. Rosie added it to make it rhyming. The song itself is already repetitive. The children really loved the song since it is repetitive and easy listening. Many of them tried to pun the lyric, and Rosie was one of them. Her chant reflected phonological play. It was repetitive and rhythmic.

Both example 1 and example 2 showed phonological play. In example 1, phonological sound produced by Didi reflected rhythmic strings of syllables. He made a conversation-like babble to accompanying him in motor play. In example 2, Rosie made a chant for her own pleasure. Both of example 1 and example 2 were rhythmic syllables. Example 1 was in the form of conversation-like babble, while example 2 was in the form of chant.

Morphological Play

The present research findings indicated that morphological play constituted 15 (17.24%) out of the total 88 instances of language play production. In addition to the morphological manipulations, the data also revealed the use of repetition to create a dramatic effect, as exemplified in Didi's expression when critiquing the researcher's diction. In one observed scenario, Didi, London, Summer, Autumn, Winter, Rosie, and Chester were engaged in cooperative play, involving LEGO construction and drawing, following their snack time. The children were playing peacefully until a dispute arose, with all of them claiming ownership of the LEGO pieces. This resulted in a noisy classroom environment, as none of the children were willing to relinquish the LEGO. The researcher, who was the sole adult present (the class teacher was not in the room at the time), attempted to calm the children down.

> Researcher : *Hei,,, sharing honey! C'mon, don't be selfish!*
> *Play together, nicely!*
> Didi   : *Huuh!!!* ***Honey hunny bunny lovely sweety creepy***

> Researcher   : *Didi!!*
> Chester   : *We are not honey!(looking peevish)*
> London   : *You're not my girlfriend*
> Researcher   : *But I love you all and you have to love each other.*
>   *So, sharing! Okay?*
> Kids   : *okaaaaay*

<div align="right">(Example 3)</div>

At the participants' developmental stage, it appeared that the children did not favor displays of affection conveyed through verbal expressions. This particular dynamic was commonly observed within the classroom context. This condition also prompted the creation of wordplay by one of the subjects.

Notably, the terms "hunny" and "sweety" do not exist as standard lexical items in the English language. Didi, however, creatively generated these words, as they rhymed with "honey," "bunny," and "creepy." He employed these novel terms because he initially disliked the researcher's use of the term "honey" when addressing the children. Didi's linguistic creativity was a means of conveying his preference against such affectionate appellations.

In the mathematics classroom, the rivalry between Didi and Chester was quite evident. Both children demonstrated a strong passion for mathematics and were eager to complete tasks first. While the researcher typically observed the class and assisted the teacher in managing the classroom activities, there were occasions when the researcher had the opportunity to provide direct instruction. During one such instance, the researcher taught a lesson on subtraction to the second-grade students. Some of the children found the topic of subtraction challenging, having been introduced to it previously. The researcher provided the students with subtraction problems and circulated the classroom to monitor their progress and provide support as needed.

> Rosie   : *miss, they're too difficult!* (giving up)
> Researcher   : *no, they're not.* (showing Rosie how to subtract using fingers)
> Chester   : *miss.. I'm done. Can you check it?*
> Didi who heard Chester has done his works said: *one more and am done miss*
> Chester   : *yes, but I'm the first*
> I checked Chester's works and found there was one mistake and I let Chester to redo it.
> Didi   : *I'm done miss.. check it!*
> Researcher : *please?*
> Didi   : *check it please.*
> I checked Didi's works, he did all correctly
> Researcher : *well done. All correct*
> Didi   : *yes!*
> Chester finally did correctly too
> Didi   : *I am smart!*

Chester   *: me too..*
Didi   *: but I'm the first.* ***Brainy Didie.. brainy didie***
Chester   *: I am smart!* ***Brainy Chester.. brainy Chester***
Didi   *: HEY!! You are following me..* (increasing the tone)
Researcher *: You both smart!.* ***Brainy Didie.. Brainy Chester***
       Okay?
Didi   *: okay*
Chester   *: okay*

                   (Example 4)

Wordplay was also observed when Didi attempted to transform the noun "brain" into the adjectival form "brainy." His intention was to convey his own intellectual prowess through this linguistic transformation, which also resulted in a rhyming effect with his own name, "brainy Didi." Rosie, too, exhibited language play during moments of anger and frustration. During a snack time activity, the children went outside to eat their individual snacks together. Rosie sat next to the researcher on a bench in the schoolyard. As Rosie opened a pack of potato chips and offered some to the researcher, Chester approached and sat down next to Rosie. Rosie appeared visibly upset by Chester's presence and attempted to engage the researcher in conversation, ignoring Chester. However, Chester proceeded to take some of Rosie's potato chips without asking for permission, which prompted Rosie to start shouting in response.

Rosie   *: Heyy.. This is mine. You don't ask permission!!*
Chester : I'm hungry, and this is delicious (grinning)
Rosie   *: Huuuuh****!! Greedy hairy beary Chestie*** (referring to
       Chester's hair and his behavior)
Chester : (putting his tongue out)
Rosie   *: Miiiiiiisssss??* (looking at the researcher and asking for
  help)
Researcher *: Chester! That's not nice.*

                   (Example 5)

Names also became the target for rhymes and neologisms. Rosie created rhyming morphological play based on Chester's name but put the names in the end of the sentence. Chester, which was considered as greedy by Rosie, became the target of mocking. Rosie called Chester as greedy hairy beary Chestie.

Syntactical Play

The observational data did not reveal any instances of syntactical play. This phenomenon may be attributed to the children's developmental stage, as they had not yet fully mastered grammatical constructs. In their daily conversations, the participants often produced grammatically ill-formed sentences, such as "I am play" or "she have," indicating their ongoing proficiency in syntactical competence.

Semantic Play

The analysis revealed that Didi and Rosie produced 14 (16.09%) instances of semantic play out of the total 88 language play occurrences. The following conversation between Rosie and Chester exemplifies the semantic language play exhibited by the participants.

Rosie and Chester were planning to have lunch together. Before doing so, Chester expressed a desire to wash his hands, and Rosie waited patiently outside the classroom while he attended to this task. After some time, Rosie perceived that Chester was spending an excessive amount of time at the bathroom sink. She then remarked that she had been waiting "like a year," which was a clear hyperbolic statement, as she had only waited for a few minutes.

Rosie : *what are you doing? I am hungry!*
Chester : *wait, I'm washing my hands.*
Rosie : *how many hands do you have?* ***I've been waiting like a year!***

(Example 6)

Pragmatic Play

The present research findings indicated that the child participants extensively leveraged pragmatic play through the manipulation of words as humorous elements. Out of the total language play production, 13 units (14.77%) were classified as pragmatic play. The following example illustrates an instance of such pragmatic play, specifically in the form of puns (Example 7). Rosie, who exhibited a prolific repertoire of language play, created various puns and riddles that incorporated pragmatic elements. She often engaged in these linguistic games during class breaks when interacting with older students.

Summer : *Miss.. Do you know what is the longest word in the English language?*
Researcher : *ngg.. I have read that before. Can't pronounce it though. It's soooo long.*
Autumn : *It's so easy miss. Try it!*
Researcher : *pne...umo something. so hard you know.*
Rosie : *no miss.. it's SMILES*
Researcher : *SMILES?*
Rosie : *yes, SMILES: there is a mile between the first and the last letter*
Researcher : *haha*
Children : *hahahaha*

(Example 7)

As documented in the recorded conversation, I actively participated in playing riddles and puns with Rosie and the other children. This interaction took

place during a lunch break, after the children had finished their meals and with 35 minutes remaining before the next class. I was seated on a bench in the school yard, conversing with Summer and Autumn about a movie they had watched the previous day. The children then proceeded to ask me to solve a riddle they had prepared, which the I was initially unaware of.

Combination Play

The data analysis revealed that participants, despite their young age, were able to engage in language play. The natural language environment appeared to provide opportunities for language input, which subsequently facilitated the production of language play. Children tend to incorporate play into various communicative situations, including language use. Language play is a universal and inherent phenomenon that children find enjoyable. It is often spontaneous and unpredictable, and more commonly observed among children with closer relationships. When children become irritated by each other's language play, it may signify a deterioration in their interpersonal dynamics. For the young participants, language play not only provided a source of amusement, but also contributed to the development of metalinguistic awareness, which is crucial for improving language and literacy skills. The presence of language play can be considered an indicator of the children's evolving linguistic awareness and its connection to their overall language and social development.

Researcher	: *What do you call a dead deer with no eyes?*
Chester	: *blind deer*
Researcher	: *nice try, but no*
Rosie	: *I know... I know..*
Researcher	: *Ookay... give a try*
Rosie	: **No idea**
Chris	: *what do you mean no idea?*
Sam	: *aaaah..* **No idea** (no eye deer)
Chester	: *ahahaha*
Researcher	: *a hundred for Rosie and Sam*

(Example 8)

The instance of "no idea" being interpreted as "no eye deer" demonstrates combination play that blended semantic and phonological elements. Although the participant Didi did not exhibit as many instances of combination play as Rosie, Didi also produced some examples of this linguistic phenomenon. One such example occurred when the researcher provided the students with a math problem involving subtraction. During this interaction, Chester was humming a song by Carly Rae Jepsen, and London subsequently joined him in singing the song. When the researcher inquired whether the children knew the lyrics, Chester responded that he was only familiar with the refrain and remarked that the accompanying video clip was quite amusing. The conversation then transitioned into the participants asking each other about their favorite musical groups.

London	: *What is your favorite music group miss?*
Researcher	: *Super Junior. How about you?*
London	: *Maroon 5 miss*
Researcher	:*aah. yes.. They are great!*
Researcher	: *Rosie? What's your favorite?*
Didi	: *I love one direction*
Chester	: ***I love U2***
Didi	: ***you love me?***
Chester	: ***I love U2**, miss*
Didi	: *you love miss fista?*
Researcher	: *owww.. you know U2? That's great. How do you know them?*
Chester	: *My dad love them so much miss*
Didi	: ***who is you too**?*

<div align="right">(Example 9)</div>

The conversation described above exemplified combination play, blending both semantic and phonological elements. When Chester referenced the musical group "U2," he was alluding to the famous British rock band, which would have been more recognizable to older individuals. Didi, who did not seem to be familiar with U2, responded with the question "who is you too?," demonstrating a combination of misinterpreting the band name and phonological similarity. This exchange suggests that Didi may have genuinely been unaware of the band U2, and his response inadvertently produced an instance of combination play.

The observations in this study provide valuable insights into the language play behaviors of two students, Didi and Rosie, in a classroom setting. The findings reveal that these children regularly incorporated playful elements into their interactions, demonstrating that play is an integral part of their daily experiences.

The analysis of the data shows that the participants engaged in various forms of language play, including phonological play, morphological play, semantic play, pragmatic play, and combination play. The most prevalent form was phonological play, accounting for nearly a third of the total instances observed. This suggests that the children were particularly adept at manipulating the sounds and structures of language in creative and imaginative ways.

The differences observed in the language play production between Didi and Rosie highlight the role of individual and contextual factors in shaping children's engagement with language. Factors such as family background, personality, and peer influences may have contributed to the variations in their language play behaviors. Notably, while Rosie's overall language play was more extensive, Didi exhibited a higher frequency of phonological play, indicating that specific linguistic domains may be more salient for particular individuals.

The study's findings emphasize the importance of recognizing and fostering children's natural inclination towards playful language use within the classroom environment. By understanding and supporting these linguistic explorations, educators can create more engaging and enriching learning experiences that build upon the children's inherent creativity and linguistic abilities.

Future research could explore the longitudinal development of language play in diverse educational contexts, as well as the potential connections between language play and other aspects of language acquisition and cognitive development. Additionally, investigating the role of teacher-student interactions and the integration of language play into instructional practices could provide valuable insights for enhancing language-learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The data analysis revealed that the study participants, despite their young age, were able to engage in language play. The natural language environment appeared to provide opportunities for language input, which subsequently facilitated the production of language play. Children tend to incorporate play into various communicative situations, including language use. Language play is a universal and inherent phenomenon that children find enjoyable. It is often spontaneous and unpredictable, and more commonly observed among children with closer relationships. When children become irritated by each other's language play, it may signify a deterioration in their interpersonal dynamics. For the young participants, language play not only provided a source of amusement, but also contributed to the development of metalinguistic awareness, which is crucial for improving language and literacy skills. The presence of language play can be considered an indicator of the children's evolving linguistic awareness and its connection to their overall language and social development.

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