



Teachers' Decontextualized Language Use during Various Classroom Contexts



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INTRODUCTION

- Preschool teachers' decontextualized language (i.e., communicated without any contextual cues) **promotes children's vocabulary learning, syntax, and further language and literacy learning** (Hindman, Wasik, & Amber, 2012; Sawyer, Atkins-Burnett, Sandilos, Scheffner Hammer, Lopez, & Blair, 2018; Snow, 1983)
- Decontextualized language is **seldom used by teachers in preschool classrooms** (Sawyer et al., 2018)
- Prior studies have focused on decontextualized language primarily in the context of literacy-related classroom activities (Hindman et al., 2012; Olausen, 2016; Snow, 1983)
- Theoretical Framework: Social Interactionist Theory**
 - Teachers' discourse in the classroom plays an important role in fostering children's language development (Dickinson, Cote, & Smith, 1993)

AIMS & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current study investigates the relationship between preschool classroom context (i.e., class activity structure and content area) and teachers' decontextualized language use:

- RQ1: How does teachers' decontextualized language vary based on classroom activity structure (e.g., small group, meals/snacks)?
- RQ2: Is there a relationship between classroom content (e.g., writing/copying, science/math) and teachers' use of decontextualized language?

METHODS

Participants

Participants in this pilot study include lead teachers ($n = 6$), assistant teachers ($n = 12$), and four- to five-year-old children ($n = 21$) selected from 6 Head Start preschool classrooms.

Participants (n = 21)	
Gender	
Boys: 11	Girls: 10
Average Age	
4 years; 9 months	
Primary Language	
Spanish: 10	English: 11

Data for this study come from a larger ongoing project ($n = 124$ children; 21 classrooms).

Data Collection

Observations of focal children and their teachers' interactive communication were recorded using the Language Interaction Snapshot (LISn) measurement tool (Atkins-Burnett, Sprachman, & Caspe, 2010)

- Observers examined the experience of one focal child at a time, coding instances of teacher language directed towards them during 6 five-minute "snapshots"
- The current pilot study examines whether teachers produced or requested decontextualized language during 109 snapshots, across approximately 9 total hours of observation
- After each five-minute snapshot, observers recorded the classroom content and activity structure for any activities in which the focal child was involved

CODING

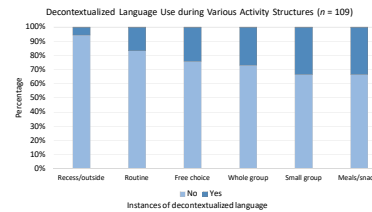
Each 5-minute snapshot was coded in terms of activity structure and classroom content:

Classroom Activity Structure
Whole Group
Small Group
Free Choice / Center
Routine
Meals / Snack
Recess / Outside

Classroom Content	
Literacy	Non-Literacy
Writing / Copying	Non-Print (Oral Language)
Sounds	Math, Colors, Numbers
Print related	Singing
	Aesthetics
	Science / Nature
	Social Studies
	Fine Motor
	Gross Motor
	Pretend / Symbolic Play

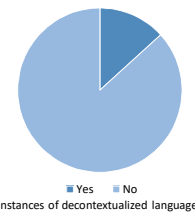
PILOT STUDY FINDINGS – RQ1

There were no significant differences in decontextualized language use across activity structures

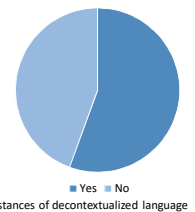


Decontextualized language occurred more frequently when sustained teacher-child conversations are happening

Snapshots with no sustained conversations (n = 82)



Snapshots with sustained conversations (n = 27)

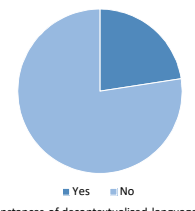


$$\chi^2 (1, N = 109) = 19.86, p < .01$$

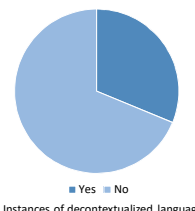
PILOT STUDY FINDINGS – RQ2

There was no relationship between literacy-related activities and teachers' use of decontextualized language

Snapshots with No Literacy Activities (n = 93)



Snapshots with Literacy Activities (n = 16)



$$\chi^2 (1, N = 109) = .565, p = .452$$

CONCLUSION

- This study adds to the existing body of research on preschool teachers' decontextualized language use by examining a variety of classroom activities that move beyond prior studies' emphasis on literacy.
- Due to the small sample size of this pilot study, our findings are inconclusive, but our preliminary findings suggest that:
 - Regardless of classroom content and structure, teachers' decontextualized language use was more likely to occur in snapshots with sustained conversations.
 - Teachers' use of decontextualized language occurs at similar rates in multiple classroom contexts, and not just literacy-related activities.
 - We found no relationship between literacy-related content and teachers' use of decontextualized language.
- Findings based on analysis of the full sample may help shape teacher training and curriculum by illustrating which activity structures and content areas encourage rich teacher language that is beneficial to children's language learning.
- Future analyses will use multi-level modeling to examine between-classroom differences in decontextualized language and classroom context.

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