

**INDONESIAN CHILDREN WATCHING AUSTRALIAN TELEVISIONS:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

This study is concerned with 'the way children watching television' while focusing on the context of viewing activities, not on the program content. The study was conducted in Sydney Australia for six weeks from September to November 1998. For the purpose of the research, two Indonesian children had been chosen as the informants. The ethnographic method employed in this study due to the reasons that the context of children interacting with television cannot be quantified. In addition, data for the research have to be obtained in a natural environment where children do their usual viewing activities. The research findings shows that the observed children watched TV in an active and critical way. They are used to giving reasonable responses to any programs shown on television.

Keywords : Ethnography, natural setting, Viewing activities

**ANAK-ANAK INDONESIA MENONTON TELEVISI AUSTRALIA:
SEBUAH STUDI ETNOGRAFI**

ABSTRAK

Penelitian tentang cara anak menonton televisi ini memusatkan perhatiannya pada konteks aktivitas menonton televisi pada setting alamiah, bukan pada isi program yang ditonton. Informan yang ditetapkan adalah dua orang anak Indonesia yang tinggal di Sydney dan menonton acara-acara televisi Australia. Metode penelitian yang ditetapkan adalah Etnografi dengan alasan bahwa cara anak berinteraksi dengan televisi tidak dapat dikuantifikasikan. Karena itu data harus diperoleh lewat cara observasi partisipatif dengan cara melibatkan diri dalam aktivitas keseharian anak ketika menonton televisi. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa anak menonton televisi dengan cara yang aktif dan kritis. Kedua informan biasa memberikan tanggapan terhadap isi program yang ditayangkan televisi.

Kata kunci : Etnografi, Situasi alamiah, Aktivitas menonton

INTRODUCTION

Today television is omnipresent. It has become an integral piece of the household furniture and practically every house has at least one set. Children are born into a world in which television is present from the start. This indicates that the relationship between children and television is very close. Wilbur Schramm and his colleagues reported 2.8 years as the average age of regular television viewing based on the testimony of parents (Gunter and McAller, 1997:4).

Although Television has become an important part of children's daily lives, the way children watch television is still a complicated issue. There are at least two opposing points of view on this subject. One viewpoint says that children watch television in a passive way. They tend to be receptive, imitative and uncritical when watching television. Susan Neuman (1995) states that this point of view is very dominant in communication theories. Another view states that children watch television in an active way. In this perspective children are considered very active in choosing, following and trying to understand programs.

This paper is concerned with the way children watch television on a daily basis. In order to know how children interact with televisions shows, the researcher formulated seven main question such as Where do children watch television? When do they watch television? How much television do children watch? What kind of program do they watch? How do they respond to the various programs portrayed on television? What do they do while watching television? Why do they watch television?

This research has employed an ethnographic method to study 'the way children watch television' while focusing on the context of viewing activities, not on the program content. The context of children interacting with television cannot be quantified. In addition, data for the research has to be obtained in a natural environment where children do their usual viewing activities. Through ethnography more detailed and in-depth information is likely to be collected since this method uses participating, observing and interviewing techniques to gather data.

Two Indonesian children have been chosen for this research based on two reasons. The first reason is that Indonesian children, like many children from other cultures, have their own way of viewing television in accordance with their own culture and it has become interesting to observe. The second is that ethnographic research on the way Indonesian children watch television has never been done.

METHODOLOGY

Definition and Research Procedures

This research employed the ethnographic method. Dany Saunders (1996:109) mentions that ethnography is a method of fieldwork research, largely

derived from Anthropology, where the researcher attempts to enter into a culture of a particular group and provides an account of meanings and activities "from first hand" experiences. In this method the researcher draws on a wide range of sources to paint a picture of a social group, and participates in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said and asking questions.

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:30) state that in general there are two kinds of ethnography ; Macro-ethnography and Micro-ethnography. Macro-ethnography requires many years of research and often involves numerous ethnographers. On the other hand, micro-ethnography of a single social situation can be done in much shorter time. This research employed a micro ethnography method.

According to Spradley (1980: 20) in conducting an ethnographic study there are six stages that must be followed such as selecting an ethnographic topic, asking an ethnographic question, making ethnographic records, analyzing ethnographic data and finally writing an ethnography report. These are all an integral part of ethnography procedures. This concept basically is in line with "the SPEAKING Grid" method from Dell Hymes who suggests than in carrying out an ethnographic study, any researcher should consider the following aspects; setting, Participants, ends, act sequence, instrumentalities , norms and genres (Hartley, 1999:140).

Background of informant

According to Ellen (1984) anyone who provides information for the fieldworker is called an "informant". In this research my Informants are two Indonesian children named Cintya Reswari and Sheila Reswari. They are both daughters of Joko Priyana and Niniek who are a middle class family in terms of their education and socio economic status.

Cintya, the first informant, was born in Yogyakarta 3rd August 1989. She is now studying in year three at Epping West Primary school-Sydney. She is also taking extra English class in school for five hours a week. Cintya has been living in Australia for Eight months, And she still has difficulty with the use of The English language. Yet she has no problem with her Indonesian language as it is her first language.

The Second Informant was Sheila Reswari who was born also in Yogyakarta on 19th July 1991. Like her elder sister, she can speak Indonesian fluently. Now Sheila studies in the first year at Epping West Primary School and also attends extra English class for five hours a week.

Both informants live in the same house as the researcher. The Researcher knows them well and we often watch television together before. Therefore,there are difficulties to engage and observe the children viewing activities. Such a close relationship between the researcher and the informants give more opportunity to the researcher to gather information more comprehensive. This is in line with

Spradley (1980:61) who says "the highest involvement of ethnographers probably comes when they study a situation in which they are already ordinary participants". In order to obtain more comprehensive information, the researcher also interview their Father, Joko Priyana, who is Post Graduate Student at Macquarie University.

To make the information gathered more valid, the subjects are not told that they are being scrutinized. But for ethical reason and practical research purposes their parent are told that their children are being observed by the researcher.

Research Question and Writing format

Research Question

Spradley (1980:31) says that ethnographic research begins when someone starts asking ethnographic questions. For that reason in the introduction part the researcher raises some relevant questions as a starting point of the observation. Research questions in ethnographic studies also can be used for guidance to with research direction and to determine which research aspects are important to investigate. In this regard Spradley (1980:32) says that there are three major kinds of ethnographic questions, each leading to different kinds of observation in the field. All Ethnography begins with broad descriptive questions such as " What people are here?", "What are they doing?" and " What is the physical setting of this social situation?". This research is concerned with the question "What are they doing?" so the observation is emphasized the activities of the subjects.

From the main question the researcher then created on research questions; What kind of programs do they watch? Where do the children watch television? When do they watch television? How much television do the children watch? How do they respond to the various programs portrayed on television? What do they do while watching television? Why do they watch television? These questions are assumed to be able to discover all aspects related to the main question.

Writing format

Crane and Agrosino (1992: 121) posits that ethnography, the process of collecting material in the field, should be based on the objective description of observed events. Yet such description needs to be classified and organized so that the reader can get a coherent view of the object of the research. In fact there is no fixed format in writing an ethnographic report. For this reason the researcher creates his own way of writing a report. In connection with this Fetterman (89:22) says "the ethnography can be written in many styles and in many formats".

Reliability and Validity

Validity and reliability are two important factors in ethnographic research in terms of effectiveness of the study. Validity may be defined " as the degree to which the research results reflect a clear, representative picture of a given situation". Reliability is " a measure of the replicability of the research results" (Dobbert, 1982:259).

Careful preparation and efficient methods of data collecting and data sorting have been used to ensure maximum validity and reliability, although absolute validity and reliability cannot be obtained in the study.

First of all, all participant observation was conducted in a factual household setting to ensure that all data collected are first-hand and free from artificial modification. I actually live in the same house with Joko's family during the research process.

Secondly, proper arrangement is made before and during the process. Since the objective of the research is to produce information for the intended goals, valid and reliable data are designed to achieve validity and reliability, ensuring that necessary interference is well understood. The researcher has openly and straightforwardly explained to the observed about the objective of the research beforehand and promised the confidence of the personal data purpose of reducing suspicion and unnaturalness.

During the process of the observation, all fieldnotes and recording are finished in as much an inconspicuous way as possible in order to record the most natural and accurate data.

Thirdly, I choose both Cintya and Sheila as informants for interviews from different perspectives. Cross-examining the different sources can only assess the validity and reliability of a single piece of information. Data from different informants are compared and contrasted.

Finally, my relationship with the observed is proper for my study. I have lived with the observed for about seven months, the trust developed provides me with easy acceptance and access to the observed. Several factors that may affect the accuracy of the data need to be addressed. The limited number of the group members may yield insufficient data for analysis. Some data retrieved from recalling may contain error due to passage of time. In addition, two field notes cards were missing and some data was lost. Finally, my personal bias against TV programs watched by the informants may color the study in unknown ways.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This research is conducted for six weeks from the third week of September to the first week of November 1998. For each week the researcher allocates two hours to observe and interview the children. During the research process the researcher is active in observing the children's behavior while watching television together with them. Observations and interviews are carried out in an informal

way so that they do not know that they are being scrutinized. The research findings have been summarized.

What kind of programs do the children watch?

The children usually watch two kinds of programs sitcoms/movies and game show. In terms of sitcoms they usually watch three types of shows; children programs, general viewing and parental guidance programs.

Programs classified as children's programs are "Babar Cartoons" and "Is play School". They also watch programs grouped under general viewing such as "Xena Warrior Princess". Another popular show was "Ally Mcbeal" which is labelled Parental guidance. Regarding the game shows they usually watch "the Wheel of Fortune".

Although during my research they only watch these five shows they state the programs they like best are Children's movies, Horror shows and comedies. They like children movies because " Children should watch children's programs" Cintya said. Sheila, the youngest informant, states that children's movies are very interesting. She does not explain what she by interesting, however.

They both liked Horror movies and are not scared to watch such shows. Cintya says means that all that happen in the horror movies is not real. The children also say that they always enjoy comedies such as "Australia's Funniest Home Videos".

On the contrary the two children do not like "Adult movies", News and Advertising. Cintya says that Adult movies are full of kissing scenes, crimes, murders and weapons. These things make them scared. Concerning the television news they says that it is very boring. and they think advertisements are a waste of time.

While watching television, Cintya, the elder informant, often hold the remote control, and changes the channel when advertisements come on. They also said that they have no favorite television stations in Sydney/Australia. Cintya knows four television stations such as SBS, Channel 7 , Channel Ten and ABC . Whilst the younger informant only knows the channel number, not channel name. For instance "Xena Warrion Princess" is shown on SBS TV station and in our television set this show is put on channel numbers 7 and 9. And Sheila knows the show is run on channel number 7 or 9. Both children are also able to name the programs they like.

Last but not least, when the researcher asks them " who chooses the programs they watch" both children say that they choose their own programs.

Where do they watch TV?

The children watch televisions in the living room. This room has no special meaning since they move into the house five months ago. In terms of color, there are three kinds of chairs in the room such as blue, yellow and red ones.

Two Indonesian Children Watching Australian Televisions (Antar Venus)

From the researcher's observation (on six separate occasions) it is noticed that both children prefer the yellow long chair for comfortable television viewing.

when do the children watch television ?

From the interviews they both say they usually watch television in the morning and afternoons during schooldays and mornings Afternoons and evenings in the holidays. During schooldays they watch morning programs (cartoon shows) from 7.30 to 8.30 a.m. and in the afternoons the children watch television (Babar cartoons and "Is Play School") after coming back from school at around 4.00 p.m. The children watch the afternoon programs for more or less 2 hours. On holidays they have no fixed schedule to watch TV either in the morning or afternoon. Yet the children always watch Saturday night shows (Xena) at 7.30 p.m.

How much television do the children watch?

Both the informants say that they usually they watch television for about 3 hours on schooldays and 4-5 hours on holidays. Cintya says that during schooldays she has a lot of homework to do as well as learning English with her father in the evening. That is why she only watches television only 3 hours. The second informant, Sheila, does not give any reasons but she says that during holidays she can watch TV as much as she likes since her father will not forbid her to do so.

How do they respond to the various programs portrayed on TV?

They says that although their English is not very good, they understand the programs they watch. They also know that on television there are real and unreal things. Yet they are both confused as to which programs are real and which ones are unreal. They only says that News is a real thing, whilst cartoons are unreal. But when I ask them whether "A Little Princess" (a fiction film showed on channel 9 television) is real or not, Cintya says "I do not know".

Their responses to programs vary from time to time. Some times they laugh when they all something funny. At other times they ask the researcher when they do not understand what they are watching. They often ask why there are Penjahat (criminals) and why they were not put them in jail. The younger informant (Sheila) sometimes mimicks the behavior or actions of the actors.

In the interview the two children state that they are not influenced by violent scene on television. They say that such behavior is bad and they will not imitate such behavior. Conversely, with good behavior they say they will imitate heroism shown by "Xena" in the "Xena Warrior Princess". Even Cintya wants to be "Xena". In other words, the children want to be their favorite TV characters and they do not like bad characters.

When the children are watching television and a pornographic scene suddenly appears like kissing, they always direct their attention away from the television or they cover their faces with their fingers.

In response to the advertisements they say that they do not like advertisements interrupting their programs. The answer coincides with their viewing behavior which is to change the channel when advertisements come on.

What do they do while watching television?

While watching television usually the children also do other activities such as play with toys, eat dinner/breakfast, eat snacks, talk to each other, jump and dance, laugh and sometimes mimic the actors' behavior. But when they watch "a good scene" such as fighting (Xena movies) their stop their other activities and concentrate fully on the scene portrayed on television. Even when they are eating they stop for a while. They both also say that if they do not watch TV they feel miserable.

Why do children watch TV?

In the interview, the first informant (Cintya) says that she watch television because it is her habit and in her country (Indonesia) she used to watch television in her own house. She also says that she watches television to learn English, especially when she watches *Babar Cartoons* and *Is play school?* Sheila says that watching television makes her happy since the television programs are very interesting. She also states that in television programs she can see many things.

CONCLUSION

Research by using the Ethnographic Method has its own Advantages and Disadvantages. Yet it is obvious that Ethnographic Research can provide data rich in detail and with subtle nuances. The results from an ethnographic method, which is in fact a qualitative approach, also seems to be different from that of a quantitative method. The differences are due to at least two aspects: First ethnography is a research method which aims not to make generalizations and Second the method takes place in "Natural Settings".

Although the research is not intended to examine any hypothesis or assumption, it is valuable to show that the results do not support common assumptions that most children in the 6 - 12 age group watch television in a passive, receptive and uncritical way. On the contrary, the children are very critical and active in giving responses to television programs. They watch television programs in an objective way and do not accept values easily offered by the television.

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