

Classroom Interaction in the English Department Speaking Class at State University of Malang

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Abstract: This study involved the teacher and students who were taking Speaking II class at the English Department of State University of Malang. The data was collected by conducting a non-participant observation, recording, and interview. Based on the analysis, the present study reveals that classroom interaction (CI) is the realization of a lesson plan which is organized in patterns of CI. There are five patterns of CI identified. The most dominant pattern is student-student (S-S) CI. Nine interactional strategies are used by the teacher and ten by the students. Speaking II class can be facilitated by implementing certain classroom procedures. The students' communicative ability is described in terms of the frequency of use of the interactional strategies throughout the semester.

Keywords: classroom interaction, interactional strategy, speaking class, communicative ability.

Mastering speaking skill is the most important aspect of learning a second or foreign language (Nunan, 1991; Ur, 1996). In the English Department of State University of Malang, it is offered as a compulsory subject given in eight credits in four semesters. Unfortunately, many research findings have shown that the result of English language teaching is still far from being satisfactory. The result of national surveys (Direktorat Dikmenum, 1990) as quoted by Huda (1999) shows that the teachers' proficiency in

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English is low and very heterogeneous. Setyadi (1989) as quoted by Lee (1991) states that many of the English teachers in the senior high schools cannot speak English. Soehardjono (2002) mentions that university graduates' mastery of a foreign language including English is very limited. In addition, Yusuf and Sewoyo's (1997) findings show that SMU graduates' competence in English is still far from being adequate.

There have been many factors which have caused the failure. Many studies concerning teaching materials, teachers, students, and curriculum have been done, but very few studies on what is happening in the classroom have been conducted. Allwright and Bailey (1991) state that to help our learners learn it is not the latest method that we need, but rather a full understanding of the language classroom and what goes on there. Investigation should be moved to the classroom.

Krashen (1982) states that learners' interlanguage develops as a result of comprehensible input that contains linguistic features one step beyond his/her current knowledge. Krashen (1982) claims that speaking cannot be taught directly, but rather emerges over time and on its own after the acquirer has built up competence through comprehending input. In addition, successful development will only take place if the learner is afforded the interactional opportunities to modify and extend his interlanguage system (Ellis, 1985).

This study is intended to investigate classroom interaction during the learning-teaching process in a speaking class which includes finding out patterns of CI occurring during the learning-teaching process in a speaking class, the dominant patterns of classroom interaction in the learning-teaching process in a speaking class, types of interactional features used by the teacher and students in the learning-teaching process of a speaking class; to examine the facilitation of a speaking skill; and to describe the students' communicative ability at the beginning and at the end of a speaking class.

An investigation on the students' communicative ability is intended to seek some information on their ability in speaking. The purpose is to get some general ideas of their verbal action to answer the questions whether or not their speaking ability improves in one semester as a result of classroom interaction patterns, interactional features, and comprehensible input.

METHOD

The study was qualitative in nature with an observational case study. It collected most of its data by conducting a non-participant observation, recording, and interview. The study used classroom process research design.

Data of this study were in the form of field notes consisting of descriptive and reflective data. They were collected mainly from teacher-students joint activities during the learning-teaching process in Speaking II class of semester III at the English Department, Faculty of Letters, State University of Malang. Before joining the Speaking II class, the students have passed an intensive course in their first semester and Speaking I course in their second semester. So, it was assumed that the possibility of interaction to occur in Speaking II was considerably high.

The objective of the course was to enable the students to become active, responsive, and resourceful participants of various roles in the debate of free-arranged topics. It was designed to enable the students to express their ideas spontaneously in a group discussion and in other activities such as story telling, language games, and news reporting (Rencana Perkuliahan Semester 2000/2001). To achieve the objective, the course provided the students with six meetings for group discussion, two meetings for language games, and three meetings for news reporting throughout the semester.

Three procedures were used to validate the data of this study: the involvement of the researcher in the research, discussion with colleagues and discussion with the subjects of this study about the data. The discussion was done to minimize the mistakes in transcription, qualification, and identification.

The main technique for collecting the data of this study was non-participant observation, the most common form of classroom observation (van Lier, 1988). Non-participant observation technique was used in order to allow the researcher to observe and to write out field notes. The researcher observed the learning-teaching process in Speaking II class. Such research was classified as classroom research (Baradja, 2000).

Recording was done by using two small tape recorders (Sony cassette recorder and Panasonic mini cassette recorder). The recorded data were transcribed by using a transcriber (Sanyo scriber complete with Foot Control). The number of recorded cassettes was thirteen taken from thirteen sessions. In addition, an interview was conducted to get the data which were not obtained through observation. The collected data were analyzed by following Mile and Huberman's (1992) procedures: data

collection, data reduction, data presentation, verification and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS

Based on the observation, with regard to the first question, the result of the study supported the interaction theory which says that (1) classroom interaction is the realization of a lesson plan, and (2) classroom interaction consists of action and reaction. The research findings revealed that there were five patterns of classroom interaction, namely (1) teacher-class interaction (T-C), (2) teacher-group interaction (T-G), (3) teacher-student interaction (T-S), (4) student-student interaction (S-S), and (5) student-teacher interaction (S-T).

As to the second question, the finding revealed that of the five types of classroom interaction, S-S interaction was the most dominant. The second most frequent interaction was T-S. In a communicative classroom, S-S interaction is the most effective pattern of classroom interaction for speaking class. Here the students get more freedom to talk in the target language. In other words, the teacher involved in this study applied the S-S interaction because she considered that it was the most effective among the five patterns of classroom interaction. For speaking class, a proportional dominance of interaction patterns suggested is 50% for S-S interaction, 20% for T-C interaction, 15% for S-T interaction, 10% for T-S interaction, and 5% for T-G interaction.

The third question referred to the types of interactional features used by the teacher in the process of learning-teaching of Speaking II class leads to this answer. To negotiate meanings with the students, the teacher used nine types of interactional features, namely: confirmation check, clarification request, self-repetition, other repetition, completion, correction which has this variation: phonological, morphological, syntactical, and semantic corrections, translation, code switching, and elicitation.

Regarding the fourth question, that is about the types of interactional features used by the students, the findings suggested that the students performed ten interactional features. They were confirmation check, clarification request, comprehension check, self-repetition, other repetitions, completion, self-correction, other corrections, code switching, and expansion. Compared to the teacher's use of interactional features, there was a difference in number. The teacher performed nine interactional features, whereas the students used ten interactional features.

The tenth type was expansion. Another difference was that elicitation was not found in the students' list of the interactional features.

Concerning the fifth question, the finding showed that the facilitation of Speaking II class was conducted by following this classroom procedure: assigning the students to read some materials related to the topics for whole class and group discussion, providing the students with some vocabulary related to the topics to be discussed before they sat in groups for discussion, focus in the instruction (meaning- focused), and overcoming the students' silence. Overcoming the students' silence was done through repetition strategy consisting of completion, expansion, and modified repetition strategies. Non-repetition strategy comprised prompt replying and nominating.

The last question of this study concerned the students' communicative ability as a result of classroom interaction. In general, their communicative ability was improving gradually. This was indicated by the frequency of the teacher and students' use of interactional features and speech errors the students produced within the semester. At the end of semester, the number of both the interactional features and speech errors was decreasing.

DISCUSSION

Interaction is an important word for language teachers. It is the fundamental fact of pedagogy. Douglas (2001) states that the next move after lesson planning is to step into the classroom and begin the process of stimulating the interaction.

In this study, the classroom interaction occurred in five patterns: T-C, T-G, T-S, S-S, and S-T interaction patterns. According to Malamah-Thomas (1987), there are four patterns: teacher-whole class, teacher-individual student, individual student-teacher, and individual student-individual student. Similarly, Byrne (1992) states that classroom interaction may occur in four patterns. On the other hand, van Lier's (1988) findings show five patterns of classroom interaction: teacher/learner-learner-teacher (T/L-LT), teacher-(learner) (T-(L), teacher-learner/learner (T-L/L), teacher-learner (T-L), and learner-teacher/(teacher) (L-T/(T). The present study's findings show five patterns of classroom interaction. So, there are basically four or five patterns of classroom interaction. The present study supports the previous findings by van Lier (1988). Compared to the findings of Malamah-Thomas (1987) and Byrne (1987), the present study shows a difference in number.

The frequency of occurrence of each interaction pattern is different from each other. S-S pattern dominated the others. The occurrence of these patterns should be organized in such a way that an instructional goal is effectively achieved (Byrne, 1992). In other words, patterns of classroom interaction should be realized and this depends on what instructional goal must be achieved. Byrne (1987) suggests that the teacher should use S-S pattern if she wants the students to get more opportunities to experiment with the target language in order to increase the students' communicative ability. On the other hand, he suggests that the teacher use the T-C pattern if the teacher wants to get more practice for accuracy, like practice with some grammatical points.

For speaking class, S-S pattern should be maximized as what was observed in this classroom. In S-S pattern, the students had more chance to experiment with the target language. The students talked communicatively to each other. In other words, the students talked more when they were given freedom to express their ideas. This situation particularly emerged when the students were assigned to have a discussion in a small group without the teacher's involvement.

Based on the analysis, it was agreed that an ideal proportion of the dominance of classroom interaction is approximately 50% for S-S pattern, 20% for T-S pattern, 15% for T-C pattern, 10% for S-T pattern, and 5% for T-G pattern. This is in line with the finding of the present study. The dominance of the patterns as found in this study was designed based on the objective of the Speaking II class. This means that during the learning-teaching process of the course, the dominance of the patterns was in control to achieve the objective. The dominance occurred as planned and it is considered as a good proportion.

The second most dominant pattern of classroom interaction is T-C interaction. In T-C pattern, the students talked only when they were triggered. They did not respond voluntarily, unless they were assigned. This seems to be influenced by three factors: the culture, the mastery level of the target language, and knowledge about the world. In a speaking classroom, culture is considered as a problem. To handle this problem, the teacher made an attempt. On the first day of the course, the teacher told the students that their final score would be based on their active participation. If they wanted a better score, they had to talk more. For this purpose, authentic assessment was used to assess their communicative performance in the classroom. In addition, the teacher did much elicitation to make the students converse in the target language.

In classroom interaction patterns, the teacher and students used a variety of interactional features to negotiate meaning with each other. The teacher used nine features: confirmation check, clarification request, self-repetition, other repetition, completion, correction, translation, code switching, and elicitation. Compared to Pica and Doughty (1985) list of interactional features, the present study found more features. Code switching and translation are not found in Pica and Doughty's (1985) list of interactional features: confirmation check, clarification request, comprehension check, self-repetition, other repetition, completion, and correction. The number of interactional features found in this study was the same as that in Susanto's (1994) and Huda's (1999) findings.

On the other hand, there were ten interactional features used by the students. The finding supported the fact that the interactional features are not only performed by the teacher, but also by the students in the interaction with their fellows. In addition, the finding of the present study supported the theory which says that input is available for the students not only from the teacher, but also from the students themselves through classroom interaction using the interactional features (Huda, 1999).

Compared to the teacher's use of the interactional features, the students produced more features. The difference was found in terms of number. However, there was also a difference in terms of classroom verbal interaction. Assigning and nominating is specific to the teacher's verbal interaction. In the classroom, it is the teacher who controls who, when, and what to speak about (Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Ellis, 1985). The interactional features used by the students can also indicate that the students made an attempt to experiment with the target language. This is in line with the objective of Speaking II course, that is to enable the students to participate and express their ideas spontaneously in a group discussion and in other activities such as story telling, describing thing, and language game.

Speaking II was facilitated by determining and following a certain procedure to follow the classroom interaction, to focus instruction, and to overcome the students' silence. The first one concerned assigning the students to find and to read some related topics for classroom discussion. This was intended to make the students possess some knowledge related to the topics. Most students are reluctant to talk due to their lack of knowledge about the topics being discussed. Wyatt (1989: 113) confirms that one of the reasons students find it difficult to talk is that they do not have sufficient knowledge about the world and the way to organize their

thoughts. In other words, background knowledge about the topic is important to make the students explore what they have in the classroom interaction.

The second procedure concerned with discussing some key words related to the topics before the students sat in groups for discussion. Commonly, students find it difficult to converse because they do not have sufficient vocabulary. Negotiation of topics to be discussed for the whole semester was done in the first session of the course. Interesting topics are important for the students to motivate them to experiment with the target language. In addition, some questions related to the topics were required in order to focus the discussion in group work. This was also discussed before group discussion was conducted. These steps could be considered facilitative in generating the students to use the target language.

The students' silence was overcome by using two kinds of strategy: repetition strategy and non-repetition strategy. The first consisted of complete repetition and modified repetition. The complete repetition was done when the teacher failed to evoke the students' oral response. This repetition sometimes failed to evoke students' response, because it did not contribute anything to make the elicitation comprehensible either in terms of language or content difficulties. Sometimes it succeeded to evoke a verbal response because it prolonged *wait-time* of the previous elicitation and provided a second chance for the students, especially those who did not hear the elicitation at all, or who did not hear the elicitation clearly at the first time it was produced.

Modified strategy was done by modifying the previous elicitation. Compared to the complete repetition, modified repetition was more successful in eliciting the students' oral response because it helped the teacher to make the elicitation comprehensible either in terms of language or content difficulty. Chaudron (1988) and Edwards and Westgate (1987) found out that complete repetition of the previous elicitation elicits less students' verbal response than the modified repetition does. The fact that modification makes question appropriately comprehensible and answerable within the learner's subject matter and L2 competence is the key factor that can explain why question modification becomes more effective than question repetition (Chaudron, 1988).

Non-repetition strategy consisted of prompt replying and nominating. Prompt replying was another strategy used by the teacher to overcome the students' silence by adding some words to the previous eliciting. The additional words functioned as cues and clarifier of the

previous teacher's elicitation. Nominating was a verbal action in which the teacher called for a student to respond to an elicitation. The teacher often nominated when a student failed to give an oral response to an elicitation. In such a situation, nominating functions as an indication of turning the speaking opportunity from a student to another student. Their function is just to regulate who speaks what and when (turn regulator).

With regard to the students' communicative ability, the finding of the present study shows that the development of students' speaking was taking place in the classroom. This was indicated by the gradual change in the frequency of the interactional features used by the teacher and students from the early stage of the semester towards the end of the semester. At the early stage of development, certain features occurred more abundantly due to the students' lack of language knowledge, vocabulary, and self-confidence. On the other hand, at the end of the semester the students' communicative ability was increasing as a result of the decrease in number of certain interactional features and speech errors.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

CI is important for the development of communicative ability. It provides opportunities for second language acquisition, because it puts the students into the target language exposure.

Five patterns of CI are identifiable. They are T-C, T-G, T-S, S-S, and S-T. The most facilitative condition among all of these is the interaction between the students. The students were highly motivated to talk to each other in the target language. In other words, the students had more freedom to use the target language, as a result the students' communicative ability was getting better.

T-S pattern of CI has also been identified to have created a facilitative condition for the development communicative ability if the teacher's involvement or domination is kept low and the meaning-based instruction was used.

The observation shows that there are nine interactional features (IF) identified. Compared to Pica and Doughty's (1985) and Long's (1983) features, two more IFs (translation and code switching) are not found in Pica and Doughty's list. However, the present study's finding supports the finding by Susanto (1994), and Huda (1999).

In addition to the teacher's use of IFs, the students performed ten IFs to negotiate meaning among themselves in interactional conversation.

This can be considered as input for themselves and indicates the students' improvement in their communicative ability.

The facilitation of Speaking II class can be done by focusing more on meaning rather than on form, and correction is done at the end of each discussion or dialogue or lesson. In addition, overcoming the students' silence is another way of facilitating Speaking II. This can be done by using repetition and non-repetition strategies.

The students' communicative ability was improving. This is indicated by the gradual change (decrease) in the frequency of use of the IFs within the semester. At the early stage of development certain features occurred more abundantly, whereas at the end of semester they were decreasing gradually. Meaning-focused instruction was more emphasized, rather than form-based instruction.

Suggestion

Based on the results of the present study, the findings suggest that teacher's excessive comment be minimized to give the students more chance to talk in the target language. A proportional dominance of CI patterns should be used for speaking class. If emphasis is put on students' fluency, S-S pattern should be used more.

Since two more features (translation and code switching) are available in the present study, it is suggested that these features be used in teaching English as a foreign language, especially in the teaching of speaking to tackle the students' lexical and lack of world knowledge problems.

The topics seemed to be not interesting for all students. The teacher should prepare a list of topics (twenty or thirty or more topics) which the teacher together with the students will discuss or ask the students to put a tick on the topics in which they are interested. In addition, the teacher should provide a number of articles or brochures from which the students can choose in the classroom in accordance with their interests.

Since this study is qualitative in nature with a case study design, it is suggested that other researchers interested in classroom research conduct further studies with different subjects, designs, and settings both at English departments and non-English departments.

Native speaker teacher should be recruited, although the institution is already established. At least he/she can be a resource person. This can motivate the students to learn and to speak in the target language.

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