Research article

Focusing on the EFL Learners' Spoken Language: An Analysis of Classroom Discourse

Harits Masduqi[1]*, Fatimah[2]

[1]Universitas Negeri Malang
[2]Universitas Brawijaya

ORCID
Harits Masduqi: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7661-7088

Abstract.

This paper discussed the spoken language produced by adult learners who attended a *General English Intermediate* course at one of the best English course providers in Indonesia. The writers analyzed examples of inaccurate and accurate spoken language produced by the students during an observed lesson and then shed light on possible reasons for the spoken language from linguistic point of views. The results of this study were intended to offer some insights into the nature of inaccurate and accurate spoken language in the learning of English as a foreign language. English teachers are, therefore, expected to focus not only on fluency but also on accuracy in English language teaching.

Keywords: accuracy, classroom discourse, fluency, spoken language

Corresponding Author: Harits Masduqi; email: ?????

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1. Introduction

Classroom communication plays an important role in the success of teaching and learning process. It is necessary for teachers to maintain good communicative practices to understand the dynamics of classroom discourse and avoid misunderstanding due to differences in students' backgrounds, expectations, and perceptions [1-2]. Walsh [3] emphasizes that teachers and learners need to develop interactional competence to create more engaged and dynamic classrooms in which learners are actively involved in the learning process. It can be inferred that teachers need to carefully craft their language used in the classroom so that students are encouraged to take turns and take parts in the classroom communication. Classroom language is defined as language used in classrooms by the teacher to control the discourse such as by asking questions [4]. In classroom, language is the means for both teachers and students obtain new knowledge and skills, solve problems, exchange information, and build rapport. Thus, effective language classroom will promote effective learning.

There have been studies concerning classroom discourse. Some studies focus on how teachers use language to manage, control, facilitate, or promote students' thinking and participation [5-8]. Other studies are concerned more with the thematic content and knowledge development aspect of the talk produced from the teacher–student interactions [9-10]. In later development, studies on classroom discourse also involve multimodality or multiple modes of representation in language classroom during the teacher-students' interactions [9, 11-14]. These studies commonly pay attention more on how teachers modify or adapt their language to scaffold their students' understanding of certain concepts. The present researchers are interested more in analyzing students' talk during interactions with teacher and peer students in group discussions from linguistic point of views.

2. Method

This study was qualitative in nature since the data obtained were mainly explained descriptively. As described by Creswell and Clark [15], qualitative data consists of open-ended information that might be taken from interview, observation, documents, and audio-visual materials. These data are analyzed by accumulating words or images into categories and presenting the diversity of ideas gathered through data collection descriptively [15-18,].

Case study was employed in this research as this research attempted to find deep understanding about classroom discourse focusing on students' talk in a general English class. Yin [19] defines case study as an inquiry into a phenomenon of interest within its real-world context and it can be used to explain and explore a naturally occurring situation. In the context of this study, this design enabled the researchers to explain how students responded to their teacher's and peer students' prompts.

The data were collected from a *Pre-Intermediate 4 General English* class at one of the best English course providers in Indonesia. The class consisted of 11 students coming from various backgrounds. Some were university students, while others were employees in local companies. Their ages varied from nineteen to thirty years old.

Using a tape recorder, the researchers observed the English class for 100 minutes. The aim of the lesson was to help the students understand and use the *Third Conditional*. The teacher asked the eleven students to form groups consisted of three to four students. In each group, the students discussed forms and exercises of the conditional. Despite the existence of L1 during group work, some students spoke actively in English.

They were allowed to speak freely, and the teacher did not often correct the students' errors. She seemed to emphasize more on fluency rather than accuracy.

3. Findings and Discussion

Having obtained the data from the class observed, the researchers analyzed the data focusing on the students' utterances. In this paper, the researchers display ten examples of spoken language used by the students during the lesson. As stated previously, the researchers analyzed the classroom discourse from linguistic point of views. Each of the students' spoken utterances is analyzed below:

- **Extract 1**

Teacher : Don't you know the formula, right?

Student A : Yes, I don't know.

Teacher : Is the pattern new for you?

Student A : Yes

Analysis: The student's remark above was expressed in response to the teacher's question 'Don't you know the formula, right?'. In replying to the teacher's question, the student showed that he understood the question and responded properly to the question. However, in terms of the language use, the student made the error due to interference of L1. In Bahasa Indonesia, it is possible to respond to a negative question (don't, didn't, etc.) by saying *Yes* followed by negative form, i.e., *'Ya, saya memang tidak tahu'* (Yes, I really don't know). In English, however, the student should say 'No, I don't know'.

1. **Extract 2**

Student B : I really wish I could study abroad

Student C : I was dream about it too

Analysis: The statement was uttered when two students were discussing something else during a group discussion. They were talking about their wishes to study abroad. In responding to the statement uttered by student B, student C seemed to respond properly. However, she might be in the process of acquiring Simple Past Tense as shown in the use of *was.* She overgeneralized the rule assuming all past forms used *was.* In addition, irregular verbs, such as *dreamt, went,* and *done* are often not acquired properly by Indonesian students since the Indonesian grammar does not recognize

irregular verbs and never apply verb changes in different tenses. Thus, the corrected version of the developmental error is 'I dreamt about it'.

- **Extract 3**

Student D : How did you meet your boyfriend?

Student E : We went to the same senior high school

Analysis: The utterance was expressed in a group discussion when a female student was talking about her boyfriend. The interaction between these two students went well since student E could answer student D's question properly using correct grammar. However, student D made a pronunciation error which showed a negative transfer of pronunciation of her L1 (Bahasa Indonesia) into L2 (English). The word, *senior*, is exactly the same in Bahasa Indonesia, but is pronounced differently. Therefore, the student mispronounced it as /ˈsⅩnior/. She should pronounce it as /ˈsiⅩniⅩ(r)/.

- **Extract 4**

Student F : I should go now because I have appointment

Teacher : Sure, you may leave the class

Analysis: The remark was uttered when a student told the teacher politely that he wanted to leave the class early. The student's utterance sounded appropriate with the context, but there was a typical error produced due to L1 interference. He missed an article *an* because article does not exist in Bahasa Indonesia. The correct form, therefore, is 'I should go now because I have an appointment.'

- **Extract 5**

Teacher : Okay, please read your answer for question number 7

Student G : If you hadn't brought the camera, you wouldn't have captured this beautiful scenery.

Teacher : Good

Analysis: This classroom discourse took place when the teacher asked student G to read aloud her answer in a gap filling exercise. From the utterance in Extract 5, it can be seen that this student had mastered the concept of conditional sentence. However, she mispronounced the word *brought* as /brⅩt/. This was an error of L1 interference. She used the Indonesian sound pattern to pronounce the diphthong /ou/. She also failed to pronounce the last three consonants because such consonant clusters do not exist in the Indonesian. In English, she should pronounce the word *brought* as /brⅩ:t/. The

teacher responded the student's utterance by giving positive feedback. She did not correct her student's pronunciation.

- **Extract 6**

Teacher : What do you think guys?

Student H : I think they had already got three points

Teacher : Thank you

Analysis: The remark was uttered when the student commented to another group's achievement during a group competition. This utterance is an example of a developmental error. She should use Present Perfect Tense since the competition was still going on and had not stopped yet. She was probably in the process of acquiring Perfect Tense as shown in the use of *already.* Interestingly, she was aware of the use of suffix *s* in the word *points*.

- **Extract 7**

Teacher : Can you please read your sentence for the next picture?

Student I : If you hadn't left the fingerprint, the police didn't suspect you.

Teacher : Okay, good job

Analysis: The teacher controlled the discourse by asking one of the students to read his sentence to match a picture with a conditional sentence. The student could respond the questions accordingly by using correct conditional pattern. However, instead of saying /ˈfɪŋɡə(r)/, she mispronounced it as /ˈfɪŋdʒə(r)/. This error was produced due to the overgeneralization of sound pattern in English. The students probably thought that the letters '*ng*' in *finger* was pronounced like '*ng' in danger, angel,* etc. Despite correcting the mispronunciation, the teacher gave positive feedback by saying "Okay, good job."

- **Extract 8**

Teacher : What about picture B?

Student J : If you had not forget …. forgotten to lock the door, the thieves would not have broken into your house.

Teacher : That's correct

Analysis: The student uttered the statement after his group had discussed the third conditional sentence in relation to the pictures shown. By self-correcting the verb *forget* with *forgotten,* he showed that he was able to monitor and control his utterance. He

was aware that the past perfect form was followed by past participle. The utterance of the word 'forget' was probably a matter of fatigue or slip of tongue.

- **Extract 9**

Student K : Mam, should we make the sentence?

Teacher : Yes, so you make sentences using appropriate conditional sentence for each of the pictures shown on the slide. Is it clear?

Student K : Yes mam

Analysis: The student asked the question in order to clarify an instruction related to pictures shown on the slide. He showed his good ability in using the question form based on the correct word order. He knew that in a question from, the modal *should* be followed by a subject, a verb, and a complement. This question form is often not mastered well by Indonesian students. Some students tend to say 'Mam, we should make the sentence?', although they say it with correct intonation. The teacher then elicited question to make sure that student K understood what he had to do.

- **Extract 10**

Teacher : Who wants to do the next picture?

Student B : *(raise hand)*

Teacher : Okay, go ahead

Student B : We would have won the match if the shot hadn't missed.

Teacher : Good

Analysis: In this classroom discourse, it can be seen the interaction between the teacher and a student during an accuracy-focused group task. It was a product of group discussion related to the pictures shown on the slide. The interaction started when the teacher asked her students who wanted to read the answers of the exercise and one of the students raised hand as a sign that she was willing to share her answer. The sentence structure that student B produced proved that she was able to use the conditional sentence correctly. It might be the result of the teacher's explanation of the form or frequent exposure to the tasks of the *Third Conditional*.

The data above have shown how the classroom discourse took place in the class observed. It can be seen that in most of the interaction, the teacher controlled the discourse by asking questions to the students. The pattern of the discourse matches the triadic dialogue initiate–response–feedback or IRF rather than IRE which stands for initiate–response–evaluate. From the dialogues between teacher and students, the

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teachers asked questions to her students to initiate the interaction. Then, the students responded to her questions accordingly. Finally, the teacher preferred giving positive feedback to her students' answers rather to evaluating or correcting their incorrect utterances directly.

4. Concluding Remarks

Having analyzed the data above, the researchers would suggest some points to consider in classroom discourse. The first suggestion is that teachers need to thoughtfully modify their language to initiate the classroom discourse because language classroom plays a vital role in the success of learning. By having effective initiation, students will be engaged actively with the classroom activities and eventually effective learning of English takes place. The second suggestion is related to the aspects of language development. Teachers are recommended to carefully decide whether they give evaluation of feedback to the students' responses. In this study, although fluency in conversation is important, the class needs to focus more on accuracy since many students in the class made frequent pronunciation errors. Moreover, to deal with developmental errors, the teacher needs to expose and focus on correct language forms and functions. Finally, the teacher needs to discuss differences between L1 and L2 to minimize errors of interference. All of these errors can gradually disappear as the students learn more and are exposed to standard expressions in English.

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