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Strategies of Managing Rapport in Classroom Discussion

Reski

English Education Department, Faculty of Social and Political Science Universitas Sulawesi Barat

Address. Jl. Prof. Dr. H. Baharuddin Lopa, S.H., Majene, West Sulawesi, Indonesia

Telp. +628114130285. E-mail: *reski.rahab@gmail.com*

Abstract: This paper aims to find out the strategies, applied by students in classroom interaction particularly in discussion, to maintain their interpersonal rapport as well as to enhance their rapport management with their fellow students. There are five strategies based on Spencer-Oatey (2008) that the interactants apply in social interactions. The strategies are request, compliments, apologies, gratitude and disagreement. The research is done to see whether the students realize the management of rapport in social interaction and their strategies that they would apply in classroom discussion. The research is done by using descriptive qualitative method to identify the students' strategies in maintaining their interpersonal rapport and enhancing the rapport management with their fellow students. The data was obtained by video-recording the interactions of the students during the classroom discussions and by giving the students some questionnaires. The researcher also applied the participant observation to see the students reactions during the discussion considering that the strategies that the students apply may bring about the rapport threat and enhancement which are subjective evaluations, which depend not simply on the content of the message, but on people's interpretations and reactions to who says what under what circumstances. The research indicates that the students' mostly applied strategy is disagreeent and the type of the disagreement is token agreement. In other words, the students tend to hold the rapport enhancement behavior since in expressing their disagreement, they initially expressed their agreement as a token of appreciation.

1. Introduction

Social interactions occur in our daily life and they have significant impacts on our social relationships with other to whom we interact. Talking to co-workers at workplaces, engaging in a discussion in classrooms for students, consulting to doctor or physician and even chit-chatting with our family members are the examples of social interactions in which we are actively involved. In every social interaction where we are involved, we need to pay attention to the norms that regulate our interaction. We certainly should not offend others in the messages that we convey or in the expressions that we tell to our fellow interlocutors. We should also avoid misinterpretation that may lead to misunderstanding which in turn may bring about offence. These norms that we should consider in our interactions are formulated in Rapport Management.

2. Rapport Management

Rapport Management is the term that is used by Helen Spencer-Oatey to define the management of social relations which is an aspect of language use (2008:12). In her theory, Spencer-Oatey develops Brown and Levinson's politeness principles that only focus on face into what she calls the three interconnected rapport management which are the management of face, management of sociality rights and obligations and management of interactional goals.

Face is a concept that is related to notions such as esteem, regard, worth and dignity and is what is claimed or protected by a person in a communicative act (Robinson et al, 2015). From Spencer-Oatey's work (2008), Face comprises three identities, individual identity, group or collective identity and relational identity. In those three identities, people consider themselves to have certain characteristics, such as personality qualities, physical characteristics, beliefs and so on. These characteristics are either perceived positively (talented, smart), negatively (uninteresting, ugly) or neutrally. In most circumstances, people want others to perceive their characteristics or attributes positively and avoid having a negative perception on their qualities. Face is associated with these affectively sensitive attributes (Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

Sociality rights and obligations are what people perceive to have in relation to other people. Sociality rights and obligations are concerned with social expectancies and reflect people's concerns over fairness, consideration and behavioral appropriateness (Culpeper, 2011).

Interactional goals are the third factor that can influence the interpersonal rapport. These goals are what people want to achieve in their interactions with others. The goals can be relational and transactional.

Hence, face, soaciality rights and obligations and interactional goals are the three important factors in rapport management and since rapport management is an aspect of language use that includes these three complex and interconnected factors and it is the management of social relations as well, it is very important to find out the strategies of managing the rapport in social interaction. The strategies in managing rapport that are applied by social interlocutors may have significant effect on the rapport orientation and vice versa. Thus, it is also important to find out these

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strategies in order to see their effects on interpersonal rapport of the social interlocutors which are the students who were the participants of the classroom discussions of this study. Therefore, the study of this research aims to figure out the strategies that are applied by students of English Education Department of Unsulbar in managing their rapport in classroom discussion.

A number of studies regarding to the strategies of managing rapport have been conducted and have found out considerable findings. Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2003) found that rapport is clearly managed through multiple domains, particularly the discourse and non-verbal domains. Robinson et al (2015) considers the three bases of rapport management as important factors in undertaking Problem Based Learning. Chen (2012) explores how people from different national and cultural backgrounds manage rapport through the use of language at work. Aoki (2010) compares the rapport management in Thai and Japanese social talk during group discussions. What differs this study from those is that this study focuses on the students' interactions in academical situation and how the students manage their rapport in this kind of circumstance.

Classroom Discussion

Classroom discussion is one of the ways to engage students to express their ideas and thoughts. Classsroom discussion has been an effective way of engaging students in the courses that they take and a useful teaching technique as Larson (2000) states that discussion is thought to be useful teaching technique for developing high-order thinking skills. Thus, we may conclude that classroom discussion is one option to develop students' skills by having them involved actively in a conversation to express their ideas.

Considering the advantage of classroom discussion and its close correlation to the management of rapport where in a discussion, which is one of the social relations of which aspect is the main concern of rapport management, the researcher finds that it is imperative to figure out the strategies in managing interpersonal rapport applied by students in classroom discussion.

3. Method

The study was conducted in September - October 2017 involving students of English Education Department of Unsulbar in two different classes. The students were the sophomore students in a Morphology class and a class of senior students studying English for Specific Purposes. The classes consisted of 20 to 30 students whose ages were from 18-22. The data consist of the observational data that were taken from video recording the students' activities during classroom discussions and by doing the participants' observation to look at the students' natural responses during the discussions and from the questionnaires given to ten random students in each class. The questions of the questionnaires are regarding to their choice of strategies that they would apply in discussions and to the students' responses and opinions of the activities in the discussions.

Observational Data

The data were taken from the video-footage of the students' activities during the classroom discussions. There are four videos from two discussions of the two classes. The videos were taken to see the strategies that the students used to maintain the interpersonal rapport during the discussion and to see the rapport orientations that the students applied in their interactions during the discussions. The three interconnected rapports of

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Rapport Management are the main framework to see how students managed their interactions during the discussions.

Questionnaires

The questionnaires were given to the students to obtain the secondary data of how students response any rapport threatening and enhancement behavior from their fellow students in the discussions. The questionnaires were also functioned to obtain the students' strategies in managing their interpersonal rapport through some written questions. Only ten volunteered students from each class that were given the questionnaires.

4. Results and Discussion

From the four videos of the students' activities in the classroom discussions, there were a number of strategies that the students used to maintain their interpersonal rapport.

For example, in the following dialogue among three participants of one of the discussions in ESP class, student 2 feels that it is important to state a gratitude or appreciation to fellow discussion participants before expressing the argument or answering a question from the floor. This is called token gratitude based on Spencer-Oatey's (2008) formulated strategies in maintaining rapport.

S1 : *Okay, we are now going to open a session for discussion. So, if you have any question, you can ask one of our presenters.*
S2 : *(Raised his hand)*
S1 : *Okay, first question from Bambang.*
S2 : *Okay, thank you very much. Eh, saya bukan mau bertanya tapi mau berikan suggestion. Bagusnya kalo misalnya ada pertanyaan dari kelompok lain, teman-teman harusnya kasihkan dulu penghargaan sama yang bertanya.*

Jangan asal langsung jawab saja. Terus juga kalo ada yang bertanya atau sampaikan pendapatnya, tolong hargailah! Jangan orang masih bicara terus langsung dipotong.

Strategies Used by Students in Discussions

The main objective of this study is to find out the strategies used by the students during the classroom discussions. The data that were obtained from the video recordings show similar result to those from the questionnaires. In the questionnaires, the students were asked about the strategies that they used to maintain their interpersonal rapport as well as to maintain their harmonious relationship with their fellow students. The following tables are the table of the types of the strategies that are taken from Spencer-Oatey's that are based on the five common speech acts strategies and the table that shows the frequency of the strategies chosen by the students in the discussions. The types of the strategies are based on the students' questionnaires about what types of strategies that they would use in a discussion and the numbers of the students who think that they would use such strategies in discsussions. The students were given a freedom to choose one or more strategies that they would apply in a classroom discussion.

Table 1.
Types of Speech Acts Strategies

No	Types of Strategies	Number of the Students
1	Requests	5
2	Compliments	8
3	Apologies	15
4	Gratitude	23
5	Disagreement	28

From the table, we can clearly see that disagreement and gratitude are the most chosen strategies that the students would apply in a discussion. It is in accordance to the data from the video-footages which show that there are thirty-two occurences of disagreements in the discussions and the students tend to express their gratitude even if they have something to argue with other participants of the discussion. However, gratitude is also one of the strategy types in disagreement as shown in the following table. From the example of gratitude provided by the table and the expression of gratitude that was applied by the students, the gratitude is categorized as one of the types of disagreement, instead of the type of strategies.

Based on Beebe and Takahashi (1989), there are seven types of the Disagreement that is shown in the following table:

Table 2.
Types of Disagreement (Based on Beebe and Takahashi)

No	Types of Disagreement	Examples
1	Explicit Disagreement	*I'm afraid I don't agree*
2	Negative Evaluation	*That's not practical*
3	Question	*Do you think that would work smoothly?*
4	Alternative Suggestion	*How about trying . . .?*
5	Gratitude	*Thanks very much for your suggestion, . . .*
6	Positive Remark	*You've obviously put a lot of work into this . . .*
7	Token Agreement	*I agree with you but . . .*

In the discussions, there were a presenting group and the audience that were engaged in the discussions. The presenting group and the audience occasionally had different perspectives in looking at the topic of the discussions. This condition brought about a number of disagreements that they expressed during the discussions. However, from the observation data, there are only five types of them that were applied by the students in the discussions. They are only question, alternative suggestion, gratitude, positive remark and token agreement. The frequency of these types of disagreement is shown in the following table and illustration of the extracted conversation:

Table 3.
The Frequency of the Strategies in the Discussions

No	Types of Disagreement	Frequencies in Discussion	Answers from Questionnaire
1	Explicit Disag	0	10

	reeme nt		
2	Negat ive Evalu ation	0	0
3	Questi on	17 (3)	15
4	Altern ative Sugge stion	3	2
5	Gratit ude	12	19
6	Positi ve Rema rk	5	2
7	Token Agree ment	9	20

Table 3 shows the frequency of the strategies applied by students in the discussions and from the observation data from the video recording, there are a number of occurences for each strategy, except for negative evaluation which has no occurence in the discussions and is not chosen by the students in the questionnaires and explicit disagreement which is chosen by some students in questionnaires but shows no occurence in the discussion, with question, token agreement and gratitude as the most chosen and applied strategies. The table also shows the students' opinion, taken from the questionnaires, on what types of strategies that they would apply in a certain discussion. The students mostly chose token agreement as their strategy. However, in the observation data, question and gratitude exceed the number of token agreement.

The discussions gave the participants two sessions to ask the presenting group. There are three discussions in this study and the participants asked three questions for each session but there was one session with only two questions. Thus, the number of the questions are seventeen questions but based on the observation from the direct observation and the video footages, there are only three questions that can be categorized as type of disagreement. The other fourteen questions are simply questions to ask certain things about the topic of the discussions without any particular intention to disagree with what the presenting groups had presented. One of the three questions is shown in the following extracted conversation;

First extracted conversation (question as a type of disagreement):
A student in the floor does not agree with what had been explained by one of the presenters. Therefore, she asked whether the presenter was sure with what she had explained;

Student A *:"Iye, assalamualaikumwarrahmatullahi wabarakatuh. Saya cuma mau pastikan tadi apa itu yang soal contoh teks di language variation sudah tepat atau terbalik karena saya rasa justru terbalik?. Kan, dibilang teks A yang lebih efektif menyampaikan pesan padahal kalau saya baca, justru teks B yang lebih, ini, apa, teratur, sistematis. Itu saja. Terima kasih.*

The other strategies that the student applied are mostly the strategies that show the students' appreciation to their fellow participants. This result shows that the students tend to appreciate other students' opinion and argument in the discussions despite their disagreement. This is proven by the strategies that the students mostly applied. The strategies are

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gratitude and token agreement. This is more clearly depicted in the following extracted conversations of the students' interaction during the discussions;

First extracted conversation (showing gratitude and token agreement)

A student in the floor does not quite agree with the statement made by one of the presenters that makes her ask for a clarification;

Student B : *"Well, okay, thank you for the opportunity. Err, saya setuju dengan yang disampaikan tadi soal perlunya needs analysis kalau kita mau, eh, tahu apa yang akan diajarkan tapi terlepas dari itu saya tidak sependapat dengan bahwa ini harus dilakukan sebagai sesuatu yang mutlak sebelum kita mengajar di kelas. Jadi saya ingin tanyakan apa yang menjadi dasar bahwa melakukan ini memang merupakan sesuatu yang wajib harus dilakukan sebelum kita melakukan proses belajar mengajar?"*

Second extracted conversation (showing token agreement)

One of the presenters feel that it is important to strengthen her argument that is peviously challenged by one of the participants;

Presenter A*: Oke, yang tadi Bambang katakan sudah tepat sekali cuma yang jadi masalah adalah, kita tidak bisa dengan gampang menyimpulkan kalau semua jenis tes yang diberikan tidak ada standar objektifitasnya karena sudah pernah dibahas sebeleumnya bahwa ada jenis tes yang sifatnya objektif seperti tes multiple choice yang dikatakan objektif karena jawabannya jelas dan tidak bakalan ada judgment mengenai kenapa jawabannya benar atau salah.*

Third extracted conversation (showing gratitude and token agreement):

One student would like to ask about something that he feels unclear from the presenter's explanation

Student C : *"Thank you for the time, well, actually I agree with, eh, dengan yang disampaikan sama kelompok tiga tadi cuma masalahnya adalah kenapa tabel yang tunjukkan, eh itu tadi, apa namanya? Eh, necessities, lacks sama wants kenapa harus ada pemisahan antara course designers sama learnersnya? Harusnya kan sama saja? Mungkin itu saja."*

Other strategies that were applied by the students in the discussions are positive remark that was applied five times during the discussions, and alternative suggestion which was applied three times by the students.

These other strategies are shown in the following extracted conversations with one example for each strategy;

Fourth extracted conversation (showing the positive remark):

One student feels that the drawing of *A model for learning* figure described by the presenting group is quite obscure for her. On the other hand, she feels that the explanation of the model is quite comprehensive.

Student D : *"Ya, langsung saja. Tadi penjelasannya soal gambar-gambar yang itu tadi, apa namanya? Model for learning sudah jelas saya rasa cuma masalahnya itu gambar jalan-jalannya, titik-titik, gunung, huruf-hurufnya itu yang saya kurang jelas dan saya rasa saya, bagaimana di', kurang setuju kalo gambarnya begitu karena menurut saya,*

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kalo saya ini nah, tidak sesuai dengan penjelasannya.”

Fifth extracted conversation (showing the alternative suggestion):

One of the presenters has provided an answer to a participant's question but the student who asked the question disagreed and offered his opinion instead.

Student E : *"Oke, lebih bagus sebenarnya kalo semua teori-teori yang disebutkan tadi, dikasih sama, dipadukan untuk diterapkan karena kan semuanya punya plus minusnya toh.”*

5. Conclusion

The types of the disagreements had significant effect on the rapport orientation that in turn would have a direct impact to the interpersonal rapport of the students. The study shows that the most applied strategies in the classroom discussion is disagreement and gratitude. However, since gratitude is also a type of strategies to express disagreement and the gratitude is also one of the ways that students took to express their disagreement based on the observational data, it is categorized as one of the types of disagreement instead of including it to be a speech act strategy. This shows that the students tent to appreciate their fellow students opinion by showing them their gratitude despite their disagreement. This is also strengthened by the other mostly applied strategy, the token agreement, that proves that the students appreciate their fellow students opinion and idea by telling them their initial agreement even though they disagree with the idea as a whole. Thus, we may conclude that the students tend to apply the rapport maintenance orientation in classroom discussion to maintain their interpersonal rapport as well as the harmonious relationship with their fellow participants of classroom discussion.

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