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INTERACTIONAL MODIFICATIONS FOR COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT: A CASE STUDY OF TWO EFL TEACHERS

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the use of interactional modifications proposed by Long (1982) by two English teachers and language learning opportunities obtained. The study found out the distribution and the form of interactional modification in two different levels of English proficiency, elementary and pre-intermediate. To answer the research questions, case study was adopted. The main data were six transcribed classroom interactions of six sessions with audio-video recording. From the analysis, it was found that elementary teacher modified more interactions compared to pre-intermediate teacher due to less capability of lower student to comprehend the information delivered. The form of interactional modification used was other-repetition strategy, where both of the teachers repeated student's utterances frequently in order to clarify, confirm, or emphasize the initial utterances. Besides, the occurrences of interactional modifications were considered to be determined by several factors, such as student's level of proficiency, material delivered, and teacher's knowledge. As for the question of language learning opportunities, the findings revealed by modifying the interactions there were gap noticing where the teacher noticed the mistakes of student's language used by bringing that gap into awareness. Besides, modified interactions also gave the student the chance for meaning negotiation where the understanding of information was obtained through resolving the communication breakdown in the classroom. Therefore, it is paramount for teachers to acknowledge, believe, and aware that modified interaction is important not only to provide comprehensible input but also to make student comprehend the information and are triggered to be able to participate in the conversations.

Keywords: interactional modification; comprehensible input; language learning opportunity; classroom interaction.

INTRODUCTION

In EFL context, learners are likely to receive input from teacher and interaction in the classroom. Good input is obtained when students comprehend the words uttered (Krashen in Kramsh 1986, p. 248). Comprehensible input is laid on the "Input Hypothesis" proposed by Krashen (as cited in Kramsh 1986, p. 248) which stipulates that in order for learners to effectively acquire the foreign language, the massive exposure toward comprehensible input is essential.

Comprehensible input can be obtained through modification. It usually takes place when there is a breakdown in communication which interlocutors attempt to overcome (Richards, Schmid, Richard, 2002). Tsui

(1985) argues the input that best facilitates comprehension and interaction is the modified one. In other words, input should be adjusted in order to make it comprehensible and available for student cognitive level (Kumaravadipelu, Pinter, Cameron, & Chaudron, as cited in Rahayu, 2013) since the development of learner inter-language depends much on the comprehensible input (Krashen as cited in Hasan, 2008 p. 32). Therefore, classroom interaction as the main source of student's input ought to be comprehended in consideration of better language acquisitions.

One of the ways to identify the way and pattern of teacher modification is through observing the implementation of interactional

modification devices proposed by Long (1982) in his interaction Hypothesis. However, in the context of EFL, there is very limited number of research has focused and emphasized the importance of interactional modification to be optimized by the teacher in the classroom along with its language learning opportunity that could be obtained through modifying the speech.

Therefore, the investigation of interactional adjustment is considered as the paramount notion with two basic justifications. Firstly, the identification of specific features used will contribute to the acknowledgment and evaluation of whether or not the adjustment is making the input rather comprehensible for the learner. Secondly, regarding the clear-cut awareness of teachers on linguistic features, exposing the characteristic of interactional adjustment characteristics will at least avoid them to using the adjustment solely based on intuitive feel that the utterance is simple or complex. Therefore, to be able to achieve the aim of the research, the following research questions were posed: (1) How does the teacher modify the interactions in the classroom for student's comprehensible input at elementary and pre-intermediate level? (2) What are language learning opportunities identified from the use of interactional modification devices?

METHOD

This present research implemented case study as the research design. The idea was due to its eligibility to attain the purposes which is it allowed the researcher to go directly to a particular setting, in this case, EFL classroom, to observe and to obtain as well as to describe the situation in detail (Fox & Bayat, 2007). This research was based on the teaching English classrooms by two EFL teachers. The teaching took place in an English Course in Bandung where interactive methods were used in elementary and pre-intermediate classrooms by two English teachers. In determining the site and participants, pre-observations were conducted. This action was intended to find out the appointed site and participants which were in line with the research objective.

The data were consecutively taken in six meetings of two different EFL classrooms respectively. Each of the sessions discussed

the different material. The videos taken were transcribed and coded for the irretrievability and transparency of the data. The process of transcription adopted the Conversation analysis (CA) which known as Jefferson's System of Transcription Notation (Jefferson, 2004). After the data was coded, the analysis started to investigate the modified interaction used by the teacher employed the frameworks as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Modification Devices proposed by Long 1983b (cited in Tsui, 2015)

No.	Type	Example
1.	Comprehension Check	"Right?" "Okay?" "Do you understand?"
2.	Clarification Request	"Hm?" "What do you mean?" "You mean"
3.	Confirmation Check	S: "Carefully" T: "carefully?"
4.	Other Repetition	: "okay, give me the sentence" S: "can you help me?" T: "yes, can you help me, please. Good"
5.	Self-Repetition	A: "I think she has a lot of money" B: "But we don't know that?" A: "But her husband is very rich"

The analysis identified the utterances that belong to the certain interactional modifications features. Each category was subsequently totaled in order to see the contribution of each modification features. The interactional modifications existed and there were several features which occurred in the significant amount.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Interactional Modification Distributions

The numbers and the percentages of each of the six interactional modifications features across three classroom interactions for each teacher at the each language proficiency level for 2x100 minutes observation is presented in Table 2.

The main result in Table 2 reveals the comparative exposure between elementary and pre-intermediate teachers through observing their interactions, especially the kinds and the quantities of modifications used. The table indicates that all the classrooms modified the interactions. However, the

frequencies of interactional modification's occurrences were higher in elementary compared to pre-intermediate classroom in total. In elementary classrooms, the total of interactional modifications were 1220 times. They were used for 633 times in class EA1 (which was the highest among the other

classes), 120 times in class EA2, and 467 times in EB. In the course of the pre-intermediate, the total of modified interactions were 1033 times. They were used for 332 times in class PA1, 414 times in PA2, and 287 times in PB.

Table 2 Interactional Modification Distribution in Elementary and Pre-intermediate classes

No	Interactional Modification	Elementary						Pre-intermediate					
		EA1		EA2		EB		PA1		PA2		PB	
1	Clarification Request	191	31%	43	37%	126	28%	104	33%	138	35%	96	35%
2	Confirmation Check	84	14%	9	8%	88	20%	43	13%	51	13%	24	9%
3	Comprehension Check	99	16%	13	11%	36	8%	41	13%	42	11%	31	11%
4	Other Repetition	200	33%	39	33%	165	37%	122	38%	144	36%	107	39%
5	Self-Repetition	35	6%	13	11%	35	8%	10	3%	20	5%	17	6%
	Total	609		117		450		320		395		275	
		1220						1033					

It revealed the fact about the number of modifications devices occurred in elementary class was higher compared to the pre-intermediate classroom. Interactional modifications existed frequently in the lower level. Tsui (2015) believes the amount of modification are the indication for the number of negotiation work in the classroom. Therefore the input received by elementary level was higher than pre-intermediate one. The findings were actually in line with the statement from Doughty & Pica (cited in Tsui, 1991) where they saw the tendency of the teacher who taught the lower class to modify the interaction was higher due to the less capability of the student to comprehend the information and their need of more interlanguage. Lastly, interactional modification occurrences were attached to the

amount of teacher talk in the classroom. Whereas in EA2, teacher talk was very low in amount due to the fact that at the day, classroom activity required the student to performed role-play. Therefore, modified interaction decreased to the lowest number compared to the other classes. In support of this, Holland & Shortall (1998, p. 65) explain that mostly teacher talk is consisted of questions (display/referential). The purpose of it might be for checking comprehension, asking for clarification, ect. Thus, it can be assumed teacher talk was highly related to interactional modification occurrences.

The distribution of each interactional modification strategies can be analyzed using the number of each devices occurrence. The general overlook of each strategy is exposed in Table 3.

Table 3 The Number of Interactional Modification Occurrences

Interactional Modifications	Elementary		Pre-Intermediate	
	Number of Occurrences	Percentage	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
Clarification Request	338	34%	360	31%
Confirmation Check	118	12%	181	15%
Comprehension Check	114	12%	148	13%
Other Repetition	373	38%	404	34%
Self-Repetition	47	5%	83	7%
Total	990		1176	

Table 3 contains the numbers and the percentages of each of the six interactional modifications features across three classroom interaction for each teacher at each language proficiency level for 2x100 minutes observation length respectively. Firstly, there was a greater variety of modification devices used in the elementary than in pre-intermediate class as a whole. In elementary class, the teacher used 360 clarification requests, 181 confirmations checks, 148 comprehension checks, 404 other repetitions, 83 self-repetitions and 44 decompositions. By contracts, in pre-intermediate level, the teacher used 338 clarification requests, 118 confirmation checks, 114 comprehension checks, 373 other-repetitions and 47 self-repetitions.

The result indicated that modification occurred heavier in the lower level. This phenomenon can be considered as natural. Because of elementary needs more comprehensible input than pre-intermediate level due to their capability in understanding teacher instruction. This finding supported the previous studied conducted by Doughty & Pica (in Tsui, 1991) where they saw the tendency of teacher to negotiate more meaning in lower level of proficiency was higher. Besides, the similarity and difference of elementary and pre-intermediate classes were found. For the similarity, both levels were very consistent in determining the position of each device. For example, both levels put other repetition as the most frequent strategy used and self-repetition were the least.

Teacher's selection of the language instruction influences the complexity of student's language and to some extent the level of difficulty of the material presented (Suherdi, 2013, p.161). To ease student's understanding in this regard, other repetition was the most frequent strategy used by the teacher in both level of proficiencies. According to Suherdi (2009, p:68) Repetition usually used by the teacher as a response to irrelevant response given by the students. This finding supported the study conducted by Penate and Bazo (1998) which found out that repetitions were one of the main interactional modification used by the teacher in the classrooms. This strategy is very useful to consolidate what is being learned. The teacher repeated the student's utterances with

the exact form of preceding utterances or only partial (keyword) of the utterances. It was also utilized in the moment when teacher want to reinforce the initial student words, to show the student that the initiate words were true, to repair the mispronounce words, or to repair the grammar issues.

Furthermore, the result of the observation also revealed that the teachers rarely used self-repetitions strategy. Such phenomenon only appeared when the teacher wanted to repair, prevent, or clearance their own utterances. The teacher repeated utterances sometimes with the exact form of preceding utterances or only partial (keyword) of the utterances. However, even if this strategy was less occurred, it does not mean this strategy was less important. Because if the teachers repeated their utterances frequently, it helps the students to get and understand the clearer information said by the teacher as well as help the student to retain the information in their head because of reinforcement. The explanation about how do the interactional modifications provided comprehensible input in six English classrooms are presented below:

Clarification Requests

It is any expression that elicits clarification of the preceding utterance (Pica & doughty, 1985).It requires the addressee to clarify the utterance that had been uttered by the speaker. As stated by Mackey in Zuhrufilah (2013) posting the question could possibly drag students' gaps into awareness (via error and mistakes).

The teacher used a very simple form of clarification request in elementary class compared to pre-intermediate level. This finding leads to the assumption that in order to optimize student's comprehension, not only the adjustment on the interaction but also on the form of language are needed in requesting for clarifications. Since language also affect students understanding. For the lower level of proficiency class, lack of vocabularies became the biggest barrier for them to optimally understand the information. Secondly, the occurrence of clarification requests in the class where the teacher taught the same material for the second time was decreased. It can be assumed that since the level is the same, the probability of understanding level can be measured based

on previous experience in the class before. Therefore, the teacher decreased the utilization of clarification request in the next class with the assumption as mentioned before. Thus, the use of clarification requests were affected by the level student's proficiency, the material presented, and teacher preference or style in teaching.

Confirmation Checks

It is any expression designed to establish whether the speaker's own preceding utterance has been understood or correctly heard by the addressee. According to Martin (cited in Suherdi, 2013, p.57), confirmation belongs to suspending systems in dynamic system. It means, this strategy usually uses as a kind of tracking device- they focus on the experiential content of an initial moves and check whether it has been received properly.

The confirmation check by repeating the information is very helpful not only for checking the accuracy of it, but also to correct the possible format of the information given. The occurrence of clarification requests in the elementary class where the teacher taught the same material for the second time was increased. The result contradicted the pre-intermediate level, where teacher confirmation was less in the second class. It can be concluded that there was another factor determined such phenomenon. It can be included to the suggestion for further research regarding the factor that determined the fluctuation of adjustment in the classroom. While in pre-intermediate level, the same as before, it can be assumed that since the level was the same, the probability of understanding level can be measured based on previous experience in the previous class. Again, there were several factors that determined the occurrences of confirmation check in the classroom, such as level of proficiency, material delivery, and teacher way of teaching. This way is important in language learning process for the student to be able to filter and distinguish between certain utterances that can be made as new input.

Comprehension check

It is any expression designed which manages to establish whether the speaker's own preceding utterance has been understood or comprehended by the addressee or not. This

never rarely occur in the opening session of six observed class but mostly during or after teacher's explanation or presentation.

Both levels utilized comprehension checks. However, firstly, in term of form, the elementary teacher used mostly the typical expressions to check student's comprehension while the higher level teacher employed more very expression to check for comprehension. In addition, elementary teacher sometimes utilized Indonesian language to check for comprehension. In which it would be better for the teacher to use English in a very simple form so that the student will get used to that particular expression. Secondly, the occurrence of comprehension checks in both elementary and pre-intermediate class where the teacher taught the same material for the second time were decreased. It can be assumed that since the level was the same, the probability of understanding level can be measured based on previous experience in the previous class. So the process of checking student's comprehension happened less than before. Thus, the determination of comprehension check occurrences could be measured by several factors, for Instance, the level of proficiency, material delivery, teacher way of teaching, and teacher's assumption about student's comprehension level.

Repetition of other's utterances

It is the strategy when the teacher repeats words/paraphrases of some part of the learner's utterance in order to help them overcome the communication problems or establish or develop the topic of conversation. It is the most frequent strategy employed in the classroom by the teacher. Long (1980) has also found that repetition is contributive to language acquisition through repairing the discourse when the breakdown in communication occurs. In addition, Games in Hasan (2013) stipulates that repetition is a recurrent technique thought that potentially accelerating effect on language acquisition by repeating the preceding utterance.

Firstly, the forms of other repetitions used in the classroom were partial, expansion, or the exact same format of student's sentences. Secondly, other repetitions were also employed as the moment where the student received a lot of implicit feedback. As stated by Mackey (cited in Khadidja, 2010) that implicit feedback utilized by the teacher

includes the repetition of student's utterances by the teacher along with changing one or more sentence's components as the correction. The contributions of other repetition toward providing comprehensible input toward the learners in learning language was revealed. Besides, there were no specific differences in both levels of proficiency. Thirdly, the use of other repetition does affected by material presented, the level of student English proficiency, and the teacher's need of doing the student's repetitions.

Repetition of Self Utterances

It is the repetition made by the speaker in order to repair, prevent, or clearance the information uttered by themselves. In addition, the repetition that voluntarily made by the teacher attempt to allow the students to get obtain more opportunities to process the information given (Suherdi, 2009, p: 68). The utilization of self-repetitions in modifying the interaction in both levels were less compared to the other strategies. However, this fact did not indicate this strategy was less important as well. To consider the function, self-repetition was very useful in maintaining teacher-students interactions in the classroom. Teacher used this strategy to clearance, emphasize, and retain the information intended. Actually, the teacher was highly suggested to repeat their utterances.

Firstly, there were no specific differences between the way of teachers using self-repetition in both elementary and pre-intermediate level. Secondly, the occurrence of self-repetition in the class where the teacher taught the same material for the second time was decreased in pre-intermediate. As it can be assumed that the tendency of the teacher to produce the unclear words or difficult expressions was decreased since the experience in previous class became the benchmark for the teacher to make the betterment in the following class. Nevertheless, at the elementary level, the use of self-repetition was very consistent. The teacher used the exact amount of self-repetition in the elementary class. So far, the explanation to such case happened not because teacher repeated purposively repeated the same utterance as the class before since the utterances repeated were the difference.

Probably the number of occurrence just by any chance resembled the previous class. Thus, it can be concluded that the utilization of self-repetition does affect by not only the level of proficiency but also the material delivery and teacher perception regarding the needs of repeating their own utterances for more comprehensive input. Making a lot of self-repetition could support the teacher to prevent and reinforce the information delivered. Moreover, this process also helps students in encouraging them to respond quickly due to the clarity of instruction given.

Several points to be noted in this regard, firstly, there were no specific differences between the way of teachers using self-repetition in both elementary and pre-intermediate level. In common, the teacher employed this strategy to repair, prevent, or clearance the information uttered. Secondly, the occurrence of self-repetition in the class where the teacher taught the same material for the second time was decreased in pre-intermediate. As it can be assumed that the tendency of the teacher to produce the unclear words or difficult expressions was decreased since the experience in previous class became the benchmark for the teacher to make the betterment in the following class. Nevertheless, at the elementary level, the use of self-repetition was very consistent. The teacher used the exact amount of self-repetition in the elementary class. So far, the explanation to such case happened not because teacher repeated purposively repeated the same utterance as the class before since the utterances repeated were the difference. Probably the number of occurrence just by any chance resembled the previous class. Thus, it can be concluded that the utilization of self-repetition does affect by not only the level of proficiency but also the material delivery and teacher perception regarding the needs of repeating their own utterances for more comprehensive input. Making a lot of self-repetition could support the teacher to prevent and reinforce the information delivered. Moreover, this process also helps students in encouraging them to respond quickly due to the clarity of instruction given.

Language Learning Opportunities Identified

Interactional modification plays a very significant role as they provide wider

opportunities for classroom interaction and student participation in learning process. Several studies also support the statement that modified interaction truly promoted acquisition. (Long in Bahrani, 2012; Ellis, 1994; Gass, 1991, 1997) agree that interactional modification provides the opportunity to negotiate the solution for breakdown communication and facilitate the comprehension for interlanguage input. Specifically, the explanation of how interactional modifications contribute to language learning is explained below. All the data was obtained through the classrooms observed in the research.

Gap noticing

In the present study, it was found mostly the teacher applied the modification to interactions due to several breakdowns of communications occurred in particular occasion. In this regard, the gaps noticing by the teacher were mostly followed by the correction. According to Suherdi (2013, p.72), the correction occurred in two places: in knowledge-oriented exchange and skill-oriented exchange. Here, the correction occurred when some mistake is existed in performing language skill tasks. One example of this moment can be seen in the following excerpts:

Excerpt p.1 Elementary level

- S4 =*assalamualaikum*
 T *Waalaiikumsalam. Please*
 S4 /**elementari**/ yah?
 S5 *Yes*
 T *Eh elementary yes.*
 S4 *Elementary yah.*

The above excerpt was taken from the second observed session of the elementary class at the beginning of classroom. While the teacher opened the classroom, S4 came late and that was his first time coming to the classroom. After greeting, he made sure that he was coming to the right class by confirming to the teacher by asking question “/elementary/ yah?” However, the teacher noticed the mispronounced word done by S4, therefore he tried to correct the mistake by pronouncing again the word “elementary” correctly. Fortunately, S4 realized the gap noticing through teacher repetition. Thus, he directly redressed the word “elementary”

correctly. The almost same phenomenon occurred to the student in pre-intermediate level.

As it can be noticed above, the interactional modification does contribute to the language acquisition through noticing the gap made by the speaker. According to Schmidt (2010), bringing gap into awareness is more contributive to the learning process rather than solely stand for implicit learning. This can be the indicator of acquisition take place. Here, the learners need to consider the input that they understand along with the output they produce with the right form of target language so they could obtain the mistaken part to be corrected.

Negotiation of meaning

Negotiation meaning is also one of the way on how learners have language acquisition through modified interaction. It is the process by which two or more interlocutors identify and then attempt to resolve a communication breakdown (Ellis in Cook, 2015:250). This is one of the effort to make understanding in the communication by modifying the utterance. The following excerpt presents the example of how meaning negotiation is happening in the classroom:

Excerpt p.1 Elementary level

- S4 ***Botak botak?***
 T *Botak bold, bold.*
 S4 *Is he bold?*
 T *Is he bold? Yes, he is bold. Tadit apa? He is not tall, he is not young, he is not fat, he is bold. Yang mana coba?*

It can be seen above, the teacher was helping the student to figure out Indonesian word “botak” in English in order for s4 to be able to make a question for playing guessing game. And to keep student’s participation in the conversation, the teacher said: “Botak bold, bold”. Therefore, the student finally could make the correct question “is he bold?” Thus, the meaning negotiation was made immediately through direct response.

The very interesting thing about above interaction that should be noticed is the way on how teacher managed to help the student overcame the student’s problem in understanding the particular word. Thus, the student could continue the conversation on

the right track. This evidence is consistent with what has been noted by Ellis (in Cook, 2015:250) that meaning negotiation is needed for the process of interlocutors to identify and then attempt to resolve a communication breakdown so that the communication triggers beneficial changes and results in a more effective language learning process.

CONCLUSION

The result that can be concluded from this study were firstly, the tendency of the teacher who taught the lower class to modify the interaction is higher due to the less capability of the student to comprehend the information. Secondly, the high occurrence of teacher repeated student's utterances. This device is considered to be efficient in providing the very significant contribution to help the student comprehend the interaction thus being able to participate in it. Due to the fact that usually another repetition is used for clarifying, confirming, or emphasizing the important issue. The low occurrence of decompositions. Thirdly, the findings also confirmed that the occurrences of interactional modification were determined by several factors, such as the level of, material delivery and the amount of teacher talk, and most importantly the experience of the teacher. Fourthly, the findings revealed two language learning opportunities through modifying the interactions, they were gap noticing which increased learner language awareness and meaning negotiation.

Practically, the recommendation is headed to teachers. As education practitioner, it is paramount for them to acknowledge, believe, and aware that modified interaction is important not only to make student comprehend the information or provide input but also triggered the student to be able to participate in the conversations. Furthermore, teachers are required to understand the way of using interactional modification so that language learning opportunities could be obtained optimally.

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