AN ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE INPUT IN EFL CLASSROOMS AT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN PADANG

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Abstract

This research-based paper presents the investigation on 1) the realization of verbal classroom interaction, 2) teacher language use and 3) teacher’s perception on their language choice in classroom interaction. Employing a qualitative research design and case study approach, the data for this study were collected through classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews with teachers. The data were collected in a classroom context where the participants were English teachers and their students at the junior high schools in Padang. The analysis showed very diverse patterns of target language use among teachers, and revealed that Bahasa Minang/Bahasa Indonesia and English were used in complex ways. The findings revealed that all of the teacher switch code from the target language to mother tongue; however, sometimes these teachers did not realize when, and why they codeswitch. In addition, the findings also showed that the teacher mostly adopted a role as controller in the classroom as they frequently led the flow of interaction. This complex picture of language use in the classroom needs to be better understood in order to improve the language-teaching curriculum.

Key words: Language input, target language, conversation analysis

Introduction

It has been assumed that foreign language instruction should be mainly through English as the target language. Turnbull (2001) support that if there is a switch to the L1, it should be minimised as much as possible. Likewise, Ellis (1994) and Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain (2009) discuss the importance of target language as input in classroom discourse and interaction in shaping learning outcomes. In other words, target language use and interaction are regarded as crucial in learning English as a foreign language. Particularly in EFL contexts such as Padang, West Sumatra or Indonesia in general target language use as a language input is necessary in order for uptake to occur. Moreover, the classroom in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context is typically the only place that language input is provided.

The main goal of English as a foreign language learning in junior high schools in Padang, West Sumatra and Indonesia in general is communicative competence (Depdiknas, 2013). However, teacher do not have the clear guidance in applying this curriculum (Hawanti, 2011; Lestari, 2003; Zein, 2008) especially on how much target language should be used in the classroom. As the result, teachers interpreted in various ways. The available information about research which have been done in Padang on the practice of teaching English in junior high schools is based on anecdotal evidence only, especially on the language used in the junior high schools. Consequently, the information about this language used is still a big question. It seemed that many teachers use Bahasa Indonesia in the classroom in teaching English.

In Padang especially and Indonesia in general, in most classes teacher lead the class and provide the main source of language input for students. Those teachers who teach English in junior high schools were non-native speakers of the English, and there was virtually no English is used outside the classroom. Therefore, students did not hear much spoken English either inside or outside the classroom (Diknas, 2010). This happened because exposure to English in both social and educational settings was limited. Accordingly, the issue of the language employed in teaching EFL classes in Padang, West Sumatra, and more generally across Indonesia, deserved serious attention. This paper discusses the junior high school EFL classroom context in Padang, West Sumatra on the nature of the target language as language input in classroom discourse.

Language Input in EFL Classroom

Recent research on second language/foreign language acquisition demonstrated that teacher talk as linguistic input influences the learners’ language competence (Caukill, 2015; Gass, 2013; Inbar-Lourie,
Similar to Krashen (1981, 1982), Wong-Fillmore (1982) supports the notion that students learn to speak by listening, just as a child learns their mother tongue by listening to talk in his/her environment. A child acquires his/her mother tongue (L1) through exposure to and interaction with the language input provided by his/her surroundings. However, the idea that children do not consciously learn a language has recently been thrown into doubt by Patricia Kuhl and colleagues (Kuhl, 2010, 2014; Kuhl, Ramirez; Bosseler, Lin, & Imada, 2014) through longitudinal neuroscience experiments with bilingual and monolingual children. These studies show children are very much “conscious” in their language learning processes.

Horst (2010) and Nation (2003) discuss that in the classroom, the teacher’s main role is to provide their learners with enough comprehensible input. It is done by listening to sufficient amounts of the target language especially through Teacher Talk. Ellis (2008), Littlewood & Yu (2011) and Musumeci (1996) support that teacher talk provides planned or semi-structured language input for the students. Therefore, many scholars concur with this apparently logical notion that teachers should provide the students with as much target language input as possible if foreign language acquisition is to occur (see Ahmadi & Panahadeh, 2016; Bahiani, 2013; Ellis, 1994; Duff & Polio, 1994; Krashen, 1982; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Tang, 2011; Turnbull, 2001; Wang, 2010; Yaqui & Pouromid, 2013).

‘Input’ refers to all types of data from the target language that the learner is exposed to and from which they learn. According to Krashen (1982), input is the language addressed to learners through any means of delivery. In line with Krashen (1982), Lightbown & Spada (2006: 201), define input as “the language that the learner is exposed to (either written or spoken) in the environment. Furthermore, Krashen (1985, 2003) proposes that when comprehensible input is provided, learners will acquire new words by focusing on the message, not on the form itself. Moreover, he urges that comprehensible input fosters the learners’ production of the language (Krashen, 1985). Therefore, learners should focus on listening before speaking and reading before writing because the development of the receptive skills needs time to promote the conditions in which production may occur. Learners will begin to produce the language naturally when they have enough exposure to comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982, 1985, 2003; Zhang, 2009).

In trying to communicate with the learner in terms of comprehensible input, teachers often simplify and modify their target language speech to promote their communication (Hasan, 2008; Wong-Fillmore, 1985). Gass & Selinker (1994: 199) discuss that teacher talk includes “slow speech rate, louder speech, long pauses, simple vocabulary, (e.g., few idioms, high frequency words), repetitions and elaborations, and paucity of slang”. Long’s findings (1985) that are in line with what Krashen proposed (1985) show that the subjects who were exposed to ‘foreign talk’ could answer more comprehension questions about the lecture than the students who heard the native speaker version. They suggest that modified input will enhance the student’s acquisition.

Like Krashen (1982), Wong-Fillmore (1985) has given attention to comprehensible input, but she puts more emphasis on the influence of teacher-student interaction in the target language. Interaction offers more opportunities for learners to acquire the language. In line with Wong-Fillmore, Ellis (1994) contends that although language input is essential for acquisition, input alone is insufficient (Ortega, 2009; Rassaei, 2012), students actively need to use the target language (Swain, 1985). Ellis (1994) also claims that interactions are important because the learners can improve their language through interaction as they listen to others, their teacher or their friend, and then they can use all that they have learned for communication. This kind of activity is seen as helpful to promote their language development. Interaction is significant because it is the means through which the learners can decode accessible target language structures and derive meaning from classroom activities (Chaudron, 1988; Gass, 2013; Lei, 2009; Wang & Castro, 2010).

**Research Methods**

The participants of this study were five teachers who teach English at four junior high schools in Padang and their respective classes. This study sheds light on the ways Bahasa Indonesia as the second language and the target language, English were used in the EFL classroom in junior high schools in Padang, Indonesia, with some data on how Bahasa Minang, the mother tongue of most of the students, was used. It used conversation analysis as a tool and stimulated recall interviews to analyse EFL classrooms. Accordingly, this research aims to address the research question: “What are the characteristics of teachers’ language input in EFL junior high schools?"
To answer this research question, each of the teacher lesson transcripts and stimulated recall interview transcripts were analysed in terms of amount of teacher language use and code-switching practices. Conversation Analysis helped in analyzing the code-switching functions in more depth and in a more systematic way, but it did not capture the teachers’ perceptions of their practices. Therefore, stimulated recall interview with teachers was applied with all the teacher participants of this study.

Findings and Discussion

The results of this study reveal significant differences between the five teachers observed in this study regarding the amount of the target language used, Bahasa Indonesia, and Bahasa Minang spoken by each teacher. Teacher A and Teacher B seemed to use more English words in their classroom discourse than the other teachers (57.20% and 54% of target language words, respectively); the other teacher participants, Teacher C, Teacher D and Teacher E talked less target language than Teacher A and Teacher B (36%, 27.16% and 27%, respectively). Therefore, a comparison of the language practices of the five teachers seemed important. This study was not trying to make value claims for the relative pedagogical effectiveness of the five teachers; it only sought to explore the implications of their use of the target language and code-switching practices in the research context.

1. The amount of teachers’ language use in EFL classrooms

As what commonly found in Indonesian EFL classes, teacher talk in this study often involved at least two languages in the classroom, Bahasa Indonesia and English as the target language. However, a few uses of a local language, Bahasa Minang (Minang language), did appear in teachers’ utterances (1055 words or 2.7%). The word count from the four transcriptions of the recordings of each teacher classroom interaction shows the amounts of English, Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Minang. Each teacher’s language used were counted in words as below.

In this session, researcher presents the words from recording transcripts of classroom observation which present the target language, Bahasa Indonesia, and Bahasa Minang. The diagram below presents the amounts of each language used by teacher in words.

1.1 Teacher A

This chart shows the percentage of each language used by Teacher A. The amount of language use by Teacher A counted in words was 4297 words (57.2%). She used the target language more than fifty percent. Her Bahasa Indonesia used was 3182 words (42.4%). Figure 2 above also tells us that Teacher A only used 19 words of Bahasa Minang. The chart above shows that Bahasa Minang cannot be recognized by the colour because the amounts of Bahasa Minang used is only 0.25%. In summary, the total amount of words spoken by Teacher A in the target language, Bahasa Indonesia, and Bahasa Minang were 7480 words.

1.2 Teacher B
Figure 3. The amount of Teacher B’s language used

Figure 3 above presents the amount of language used spoken by Teacher B. She used 5366 words of target language (54.49%) in four recordings of classroom interaction. The pie chart above also shows that there is a little difference with Teacher A who used Bahasa Indonesia for 3182 words (42.4%); Teacher B used more Bahasa Indonesia, 4401 words (44.96%). The mother tongue used by Teacher B is 80 words (0.81%). The total amount in four recordings are 9847 words which included the target language, Bahasa Indonesia, and Bahasa Minang.

1.3 Teacher C

The amount of Teacher C’s language used on the pie chart above shows that she used 2161 words (36.07%). The use of Bahasa Indonesia (L2) used by Teacher C was 3718 words (2.07%). She used Bahasa Minang as her first language in teaching English for 111 words (1.85%). The total amount of target language, Bahasa Indonesia, and Bahasa Minang used by Teacher C was 5990 words.

1.4 Teacher D

It is shown in the pie chart above, teacher D used 27.16% the target language or 1654 words. She used less target language compare to three previous teachers. She used 4240 words of Bahasa Indonesia (69.62%) which almost reached 70% which meant she used more Bahasa Indonesia than the target language or English. Significantly, Teacher D spoke much mother tongue rather than teacher A, teacher B, and Teacher C. Based on the chart, Teacher D used 4.9% of mother tongue or 398 words of Bahasa Minang. The total amounts of words of four recordings of Teacher D were 6192 words.
1.5 Teacher E

As it can be seen from the pie chart above the use of target language by Teacher E was 26.60% or 2487 words. It was not really different from Teacher D. Furthermore, Bahasa Indonesia used by Teacher E was 6318 words (67.55%). In addition, Teacher E used Bahasa Minang for 547 words (5.85%). The total amount of three languages in four recordings was 9352 words. From the chart above, Teacher D and Teacher E used Bahasa Minang more than Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher C who used Bahasa Minang for less than 5%. Teacher D and E used 6% Bahasa Minang.

The data description above show the percentage of each language use by each teacher in EFL classroom. Based on the data above it can be shown in the following table the average of teachers’ language used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>The target language</th>
<th>Bahasa Indonesia</th>
<th>Bahasa Minang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A, B, C, D and E</td>
<td>15965</td>
<td>21859</td>
<td>1055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>41.10%</td>
<td>56.24%</td>
<td>2.71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table presents the amount of teacher talk over four sessions, represented as the total number of words spoken by teachers in English as the target language, Bahasa Indonesia as a second language or Bahasa Minang as the first language; thus revealing the raw data on the nature of language input. It illustrated the overall proportions of teacher talk at junior high school EFL classrooms in Padang, West Sumatra which may be representative of Indonesian junior high school classrooms in general. Overall, the video recordings of the classes indicated that the five teachers used Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Minang for 58.9% and 41.1% was devoted to the use of English during four lessons. The percentage of Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Minang is bigger than the target language which indicated teachers did not provide enough input for their students.

Teachers in this study used English, Bahasa Indonesia, and Bahasa Minang in varying amounts but averages are often misleading. Results shows that Teacher A and Teacher B spoke more in the target language (57.2% and 54%), thus providing their students with more language input compared to Teacher C, Teacher D, and Teacher E who provided their students with 36%, 27.16%, and 27% of target language input respectively. These varied amount of words and various languages used by the teachers may be explained by the frequent amounts of code-switching that occurred in the observed classes, however quantitative analysis is not intended in this research. Having shown overall teachers’ language use the next section reports the teachers’ code switching practices as the following:

2 Code Switching Practices in EFL Classrooms

The language that teachers used in the process of teaching English should be confirmed by doing interview with each teacher. Therefore, stimulated recall interview was used to recall participant’s thought toward their video recording of their teaching. Researcher asked the participants the reason they code switching to the target language during their teaching process while watching the video. The aim of stimulated recall interview is to help participants recall their thought and reflect it on how their language used during teaching process. The data below presented the transcript of video recording and interview.
transcript which consist of participants’ answer on why they switch code at certain part of video recording and how much target language they used during their teaching. Researcher showed the transcripts to the teacher participants to help them to recall their thought and answer the question based on what they did during the classroom interaction.

During the whole process of teaching English, teachers mix the three languages in explaining the lesson. To make students understand toward the lesson, they use English actually then followed by using Bahasa Indonesia. The fact showed that teachers use English for pedagogic reasons. Based on interview done by researcher, it showed that Teacher B and Teacher C used the target language for introducing the new vocabulary. They code switched in classroom for explaining the lesson because they have perception that students have no background about English since English is not taught in elementary school. Teachers also said that students have lower competence in learning English.

Teacher A used English to give instruction as she said “look at here” indicated that she asked students to see the material on the text book. Then, she asked students to check it together by giving instruction “let’s check”. She explained in the stimulated recall interview This language function was from her answer in the interview as below:

> This is the same as before. In giving instruction, if students do not understand, I directly translate it. It can be said when Adel took the recording is the very beginning step for them. Many students do not understand and get doubt. So, I translated it from English to Bahasa Indonesia. (Interview Transcript 1)

3 The Characteristic of Language Input in EFL Classrooms.

In Indonesia, the four skills of language: learning, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, are expected to be developed by the students at junior high school level. However, the major focus is listening and speaking (Depdiknas, 2013). Even though the general objective of the English subject in junior high schools is to develop listening and speaking skills, grammar was the main focus of the classes for all teachers involved in this study. It was taught within the context of oral activities by Teacher A and B and writing activities by Teacher C, Teacher D and Teacher E.

The five teacher participants in this study had differing foci in the observed lessons. Teacher A and B focused principally on speaking skills, with a certain emphasis on introducing new vocabulary; Teacher C, Teacher D and Teacher E primarily focussed on writing skills. In their observed lessons, Teacher A and Teacher B frequently focused on providing their students with practice of target language structures via speaking activities. Teacher B explained grammatical items, and then provided controlled speaking tasks to practice them in context. Similar to Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D and Teacher E focused their lessons on grammar; however, they used Bahasa Indonesia much more than Teacher A and Teacher B in their interaction with the students. Most of the activities in their lessons were writing activities.

As the table presented previously, it shows that the average of target language used by five teachers as participants indicate that they used much Bahasa Indonesia than target language or English. The average of target language use is 41.03 % while Bahasa Indonesia reaches 56.42%. The results do not support the goal of dideks which states that the students should be exposed as much as possible to the target language (Depdiknas, 2013). Krashen (1985) proposed that students should be given enough comprehensible input.

What is interesting from teacher A and teacher B language used in EFL classroom makes their belief that students get comprehension toward meaning of the language they spoke. In the interview, researcher asked about the percentage of Teacher A and B used the target language in the classroom. They concluded that they used 50 % of the target language in the EFL classroom. They proposed that the target language should be used higher than two other languages, Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Minang. They told that using the target language should be 50 %, Bahasa Indonesia 40 % and Bahasa Minang 10 %. This is the following shows participants’ answer to what extent they should use the target language.

(Interview transcript of teacher A)

Interviewer: What do you think of percentage you used target language, Bahasa Indonesia, and Bahasa Minang in the classroom?

Teacher: It is about 50 % of target language, 40 % of Bahasa Indonesia, and 10 % of Bahasa Minang.

(Interview transcript of teacher B)

Interviewer: What do you think of percentage you used the target language in the classroom?

Teacher: For this... oh i want to the maybe for the 50
Teacher: 50% because of my students very very low about this language about this vocabulary about this all of them about the material.

The answer from first interview transcript above revealed that Teacher A realize that she used the target language about 50% and the transcript showed she produced 57.20%. Teacher B also has the same perception as Teacher A that she used 50% of the target language and the data from transcript proved that Teacher B used 54.49% target language. However, they did not deny that using Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Minang also support their teaching. Sert (2005) stated that it is hard for teacher to stand alone with the target language use only and, moreover, teachers share the same mother tongue with students. In this research it was assumed that students would be confused if English was fully used in the classrooms mentioned before that the student participants in this research were beginners of English. Therefore, teachers needed to use Bahasa Indonesia in certain amount.

Teacher A and B also said that they used English in explaining the lesson but it was also followed by Bahasa Indonesia because of their students have lack of background knowledge of English. Furthermore, Teacher A and Teacher B agreed that they had to use Bahasa Indonesia in order to make students understand the meaning of English words and remember them.

Teacher A, in the classroom, used much target language. It means that she provided much input for her students. This data was in line with her answer in the stimulated recall interview in which she stated the use of target language in classroom is about 50%. The transcript of video recording proved that Teacher A used 57.20% target language. Teacher A used English to communicate with her students. Based on the transcript, it can be seen that Teacher A used English not just for reading the text book but also to ask the students to repeat the sentence by sentence.

Furthermore, Teacher B used 54.49% of target language in the classroom. She also did the same pattern as Teacher A in terms of using the target language. She used English to interact because she thought it could be useful for students if teachers used English communicatively. The input they gave to students may became an output for their students. At the certain part of teaching, students responded to teacher’s command and instruction in English. It can be assumed that Teacher A and Teacher B used English communicatively so that students understand what they said so they responded in English.

An interesting result came from three other teachers who produced less target language than Teacher A and B. Data from the transcript of video recording revealed that Teacher C, D, and E used less than 50% target language. Furthermore, this data was not in accordance with the data from stimulated vrecall interview with the teacher. When teachers were asked to what extent they used target language during their interaction with the students in the classroom, Teacher C said she used 75% target language in the classroom. However, word counting of transcript of video recording of classroom interaction showed that Teacher C used only 36.07% target language in the classroom.

(Interview transcript of teacher C)

Interviewer: Approximately, how many percentage you use target language in the classroom?
Teacher: It is about 75%
Interviewer: you have used 75% target language when you teach?
Teacher: yes.

Based on Teacher C’s answer above, it can be concluded that teacher C did not aware of her language used. Accordingly, she gave not enough input for her students which may affect students output. This finding is in line with Polio & Duff (1994). On the other hand, Teacher D did not state clearly how many percentage she used target language during her interaction with the students in the classroom. She said that it depends on the situation she faced in the classroom.

(Interview transcript of teacher D)

Interviewer: First, what do you think of the percentage of the target language you use, Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Minang?
Teacher you use: If we make it into percentage, it cannot be calculated because we face the real object. Automatically, we face the different situation therefore we should adapt to it.

Similar to Teacher C, Teacher E in the interview admitted that he used 40% or 50% of target language. In fact, the transcript shows that he used only 26.60% of target language. It indicated that Teacher E did not
give enough input in teaching; he did not aware of his language used. In conclusion almost all answers given by five teachers in the interview were not in accordance with their video recording transcripts that they used less target language. Calman & Daniel (1998) proposed the proportional use of L1 and L2, in this research Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Minang, should be used in range of 5%. Following Atkinson (1987) and Cook (2001) Zainil (2017) says that the proportional amounts of L1 use is in range of 5% to 30%.

Teacher A’s and Teacher’s B language input included much of the repetition that constitutes much of the teacher discourse. Wong-Filimore discusses that repetition is said to contribute to success in language learning (1985). It makes input comprehensible by giving the students opportunities to hear the same content or another chance to hear the sentence (Long, 1981; Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987; Wong-Filimore, 1985). In line with (Long, 1981; Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987; Wong-Filimore, 1985) Horst (2010) and Brown, Waring, & Donkaebua (2008) mentioned that repetition in the spoken input of the language classroom is crucial.

The other thing to be noted from Teacher A and Teacher B is that they creates a rich and conducive learning environment by providing more input to the students. For the reason that modelling requires children to repeat or imitate teachers’ statements, this strategy could be suitable for grade 7th school students who just begun to learn English. Currently, no English is offered to primary school students in Indonesia (Depdiknas, 2013). Krashen (1985: 9) mentioned that language teaching in a sense is to optimise samples of language for the learner to profit from—the best ‘input’ to the process of language learning. Everything the teacher does provides the learner with opportunities for encountering the language.

It was good that students had more opportunities to listen and participate in classroom interaction. Giving input constantly to students probably is the best way to teach a foreign language. In the EFL classroom, as in many types of teacher-fronted classes, turn-taking is usually allocated and controlled by the teacher. Similarly, as in other classrooms in Indonesia, when it comes to allocating the turn, the teacher holds the floor and students are entitled to participate only when the teacher addresses them.

In this research, teachers also initiated the topic, dominated the floor and the turns. Their students, on the other hand, most of the time only responded to the teacher. Communication, in the sense of conversation in the target language, only occurred during the first few minutes of class. Then, the classroom discourse centered on grammar, using Bahasa Indonesia. The teachers often employed switch repetitions, exact repetitions of the same content in one of the other languages, in their explicit teaching of grammar.

In addition, teachers often did not seem to be very aware that they were not providing their students with opportunities for target language learning input. The amount of teacher talk in their lesson, specifically in Bahasa Indonesia was high. It was noticed that there were instances in Teacher C’s classroom which allowed students to produce the target language. However, it appeared that students only repeated utterance by utterance after the teacher. She read a sentence or a phrase which was followed or repeated by students; sometimes she asked one student to repeat after her.

In conclusion, the nature of input evidently plays a critical role in language learning. In terms of providing input for their students, teachers in this study were not providing their students with enough target language; accordingly, in their interaction with the students in the classroom involved code-switching.

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