

INVESTIGATING LEARNERS' NEGOTIATION OF MEANING AND LANGUAGE AWARENESS BASED ON LEARNERS' LEVEL OF PROFICIENCY

Anggreini Khandari, Flora, Muhammad Sukirlan

Lampung University
akhandari@gmail.com

Abstract

The research aimed to find out the process of negotiation of meaning and investigate students' awareness during negotiation of meaning process by emphasizing students' language awareness with different level of proficiency. The subjects were six senior high school students. The data analysis was done through several steps (1) transcribing and coding students' utterances; (2) calculating the students' mistakes in term of language components; (3) interviewing the students; (4) analyzing the whole data obtained. The findings showed that the students used various ways to express their partial or total lack understanding and react to the interlocutor's signal. Furthermore, the students made many mistakes on the process of interaction which indicated the students with different level of proficiency had a low awareness (39.5%) to interlocutor mistakes. The rest, (60.5%) indicated the students' unawareness because all mistakes made by interlocutor were not corrected. Therefore, there was no guarantee that interaction focused on negotiation of meaning could help students to obtain comprehensible input if the participants had a low awareness to language learnt.

Key words: language awareness, negotiation of meaning, proficiency

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengetahui proses negosiasi makna dan meneliti kesadaran bahasa siswa selama proses negosiasi makna dengan menekankan pada perbedaan tingkat kecakapan siswa. Subjek penelitian adalah enam siswa SMA. Analisis data dilakukan melalui beberapa tahap yaitu, (1) menyalin dan mengode ucapan siswa; (2) menghitung kesalahan komponen bahasa siswa; (3) menginterview siswa; (4) menganalisa data secara keseluruhan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa menggunakan berbagai cara untuk mengekspresikan setengah atau seluruh kurangnya pemahaman mereka dan respon dari sinyal yang diberikan lawan bicara. Selanjutnya, siswa membuat banyak kesalahan dalam proses interaksi yang mengindikasikan siswa dengan kecapakan yang berbeda memiliki kesadaran yang rendah (39,5%) terhadap kesalahan lawan bicara. Sisanya, (60,5%) menindikasikan siswa tidak sadar kesalahan lawan bicara yang tidak diperbaiki. Oleh karena itu, tidak ada jaminan bahwa negosiasi makna dapat membantu siswa untuk mendapat input yang komprehensif jika siswa memiliki kesadaran rendah terhadap bahasa yang dipelajari.

Kata kunci: kesadaran bahasa, negosiasi makna, kecakapan

INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies have recently been undertaken with respect to how learner's language awareness is and how important language awareness is in the process of learning language (Piper, 2003; Perez, 2006; Gavidia, 2012; Yang, 2013; Rahmi & Erlinda, 2014; Oel, 2016; Saenz, 2016). Language awareness is important for learners who learn English as a foreign language subject in their school. It is because language awareness can be assumed as crucial factor in the process of language learning that the learners are required to be able to explore and discover more about how language features works by paying much attention to language in use which is regarded as possible to gain learners' insight into how language is used. However, the existence of students' language awareness in the process of English learning in foreign setting is sometimes neglected.

Rahmi and Erlinda (2014) point out the awareness of students in learning foreign language is important to be developed because students' knowledge of language leads to a greater and more confident use of acquired language. When learners have high awareness toward language they learn, it is expected that the learners will be confident and curious about the target language during the process of learning the target language.

According to Carter (2003), language awareness refers to the development in learner of an enhanced consciousness of and sensitivity to the forms and function of language. Furthermore, Bourke (2008) mentions the aim of language

awareness is to develop an awareness of and sensitivity to form, and not just to learn a long list of grammatical items. In fact, sometimes the process of English learning in foreign setting does not stimulate and support the students to develop and enhance their awareness to language features. In this matter, to develop and maintain students' language awareness, the students have to explore structured input and develop an awareness of particular linguistic features by performing certain operations.

Furthermore, learning English is best learned and taught through oral interaction in the classroom because it can create and force the opportunities for the language learners to use target language and develop their linguistic competence. The previous statement is in line with what has been suggested by Pica, Kanagy, and Falodun in Yufrizal (2008) who claim language is best learned and taught through interaction. In the process of interaction, it is believed the learners will acquire the target language if the learners obtain input one level beyond their current level of proficiency. Furthermore, during the process of interaction, sometimes the learners are pushed to produce target language in order to maintain the interaction. This may occur through an interactional process which is called "negotiation of meaning", a term first introduced by Long in the early of 1980s. In this process, if the speaker and listener try to modify their input and output in order to have smooth conversation, they must maintain a certain level of mutual

understanding. On the other word, the comprehension both of addressee and addressor can be achieved through negotiation of meaning.

Recent studies have demonstrated about negotiation of meaning (Pica et al, 1989; Almahroqi & Tuzlukova, 2011; Flora, 2013; Ibarrola & Martinez, 2014; Palma, 2014; Cook, 2015). Numerous previous studies have been conducted in negotiation of meaning scope, however it did not confirm whether negotiation of meaning could really help student acquisition. Pica et al (1989) as cited in Champakaew & Pencingkarn (2014) believe that through “negotiation of meaning” learners gain opportunities to make efforts in producing new L2 words and grammatical structures. According to Yuan & Wang (2006) as cited in Almahroqi & Tuzlukova (2011), negotiation of meaning is essential in foreign language classroom as it provides learners with the opportunity to produce language in a non-threatening atmosphere. Furthermore, Cook (2015), in her research, she discusses whether certain inputs are able to be resolved through negotiation of meaning. The result of her research points out that the type of negotiation of meaning may provide the learner with an opportunity to acknowledge language use in terms of intentions, rather than solely focusing on achieving comprehension.

In addition, Uztosun & Erten (2014) state that studies focusing on the effects of proficiency are important, as they reveal how developing competencies in English influences learners’ ability to overcome communication problems

in interaction. Yufrizal (2007: 46) also states that proficiency as an individual variable factor is usually tied to the studies of interaction and negotiation of meaning.

Furthermore, Yule and Macdonald (1990) as cited in Watanabe and Swain (2008) suggest that different proficiency pairs can work successfully when each member is given appropriate interactive roles. They found that when the lower proficiency member was responsible for the more dominant role, there was more negotiation of meaning and a successful resolution of referential conflicts. However, when the higher proficiency members play the more dominant role, they engage in little negotiation and the higher proficiency members seem to ignore their lower proficiency partners’ contribution, while the lower proficiency partners often assumed a passive role. However, whether proficiency pairs in conversational interaction will affect their language awareness or not during negotiation of meaning, it should be interestingly investigated.

The explanation above had motivated the researcher to fill this research gap, how awareness of students with different level of proficiency works together during negotiation of meaning. The present study attempted to address the following research questions:

1. How is the process of negotiation of meaning in terms of signals and responses made by the students when the students involve in an interaction that supports the process of learning English?

2. How are the students' mistakes during negotiation of meaning in the process of English learning?
3. How is language awareness of students with different level of proficiency in the process of negotiation of meaning in English learning process?

of the negotiation of meaning by dividing them into some groups classified based on students' level of proficiency in English speaking skill. In addition, the researcher had conducted an interview to consider how much the students were being aware of the use of language they use during interaction in the classroom.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research was a case study. The subjects of the research were six second grade students at SMA Negeri 03 Kotabumi, North Lampung. Furthermore, the researcher used multiple sources of information to gather data which include, observation, interview, audio-visual material, speaking test, and tasks. The data collecting technique for this study were obtained through the observing and recording the students' conversation while accomplishing task given, the students' interview, and speaking test to describe the students' language awareness in the interaction process

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher put several data to determine the answer of the research question number 1, there is "How is the Process of Negotiation of Meaning in Terms of Signals and Responses Made by the Students when the Students Involve in an Interaction that Supports the Process of Learning English?". Regarding to the result of students' interaction, the number of signal and response for negotiation of meaning produced by students is presented in the following table:

Table 1. Number of Signal Produced by Students

Students Group	Confirmation Check						Clarification		Total
	Repetition		Modification		Completion		Request		
	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	
High-High	5	5	2	1	10	8	5	0	36
Low-Low	7	1	0	2	4	1	9	6	30
High-Low	10	6	2	0	9	4	10	5	46
Total	22	12	4	3	23	13	24	11	112
Mean	7.33	4	1.33	1	7.66	4.33	8	3.7	

Table 2. Number of Response Produced by Students

Students Group	Response										Total
	SR		OR		SM		OM		CNR		
	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	1 st	2 nd	
High-High	6	0	4	1	2	1	2	1	8	11	36
Low-Low	7	2	3	2	6	2	0	2	4	2	28
High-Low	5	2	6	3	4	3	4	2	11	4	40
Total	18	4	13	6	12	6	6	5	23	17	110
Mean	6	1.33	4.33	2	4	2	2	1.67	7.67	5.7	
Total 1&2	22		19		18		11		40		
Percentage	20%		17.3%		16.4%		10%		36.4%		

Note:

1st was the first meeting

2nd was the second meeting

The results revealed that all groups proficiency produced relatively different number of the first and second meeting. In the first meeting, all groups produced a relatively greater number of signal and response than the second meeting. Hence, it was a bit difficult to determine the pattern of students' negotiation of meaning because all the groups had different number of the first and second meeting by producing the number of signal and response. On the other words, the task given might affect much to the quantity of students' negotiation of meaning. This is in line with what Al-Mahrooqi and Tuzlokuva's finding that the type of tasks used to generate input, output, and modified interaction has a potential effect on the amount of negotiation going on (Al-Mahrooqi and Tuzlokuva, 2011).

The familiarity of task was considered as a concern because this present research used the same task in both the first and the second meeting. In the second meeting, the students were familiar to the kind of task given. The familiarity with the task results in less negotiation of

meaning because "when interlocutor share a common background and language, the turn-taking sequence was likely to proceed smoothly without enough negotiation exchanges" (Gass & Varonis, 1985 quoted in Arslanyilmaz, 2007). Besides, Robinson cited in Arslanyilmaz (2007) argues that task familiarity is less cognitively demanding than an unfamiliar task, which puts functional demands on students resulting in an increased need for negotiation of meaning. In addition, Robinson claims that task familiarity reduces resource demands, attentional and memory resources, which are to be used during task completion. On the other word, task familiarity may reduce the need for negotiation of meaning. Meanwhile, task unfamiliarity brings novelty to the task completion activity causing students to be more interactive. Meanwhile, Robinson as cited in Arslanyilmaz and Susan (2010) reports that students provided with unfamiliar tasks got involved in more negotiated interaction than students did with familiar tasks.

It is understandable the students produced greater number in the first meeting because it was the first time they got a task kind of gap information task. In addition, most students also said that they were more interested on the first task which was about attending concert than the second task which was about choosing holiday destination. It can be inferred that when the students were interested in a topic of task given, they would produce more utterances during interactional conversation. Meanwhile, whenever the students felt not interested in the task topic or have been familiar to the task given, they would also show

it through their performance. That was why familiarity and unfamiliarity of task and students' interest to the task could affect the quantity of students' meaning negotiation performance during accomplishing task given.

Furthermore, the second research question, that is, "How are the students' mistakes during negotiation of meaning in the process of English learning?". The tables below are the total number of students' mistake at the first and the second meeting.

Table 3. The Total Result of Language Aspect of Students' Mistake

Students' Group	Aspect of Language											
	Grammar				Vocabulary				Pronunciation			
	1*	2*	∑	r	1*	2*	∑	R	1*	2*	∑	r
High-High	24	16	40	20	4	2	6	3	11	4	15	7.5
Low-Low	27	15	42	21	20	12	32	16	9	26	35	17.5
High-Low	25	16	41	20.5	3	3	6	3	15	11	26	13
Total	123				44				76			
Total Mistakes	243											
Percentage	50.6%				18.1%				31.3%			

According to the results, it could be interpreted that all students who produced utterances made mistakes and also were not aware to mistakes. One of the implications why the students were not aware to mistake was because they was asked to talk spontaneously. Besides, another implication was because there was no instruction given which asked the students to give correction for any mistakes produced by their interlocutor during interaction. In this case, the students did not realize the mistakes since apparently they got the idea or understood of his or her friends' utterances. They mostly

did not pay attention or were not aware of the language components of speaking accuracy, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. According to students' answer in the interview section, they tend to focus more on the meaning than their interlocutor accuracy in speaking.

According to data, the result of grammar mistakes could be said that generally all students who involved in interaction found difficulty to make a correct grammatical sentence. EFL learners are all different since they have distinct characteristics that undoubtedly affect their second

language learning. However, that difficulty might be different for every individual because it depends on their proficiency level and their development as well as individual characteristics such as grammatical sensitivity (Graus and Coppen, 2015 cited in Oel, 2016).

In the present study, the result showed that students with different level of proficiency had low awareness and slightly different in grammatical sensitivity. It could be considered through the result of analysis how the students were not being aware to incorrect sentence patterns. According to Graus and Coppen (2015) as cited in Oel (2016), there are some possibilities of grammatical complexity might cause difficulties. One of their arguments about grammatical complexity is grammatical complexity is explained as complexity form, meaning or form-meaning relationship. In this case, grammatical complexity is showed by a sentence that expresses more meaning and is constructed by compound complex sentence.

Furthermore, pronunciation was the second highest frequency mistake in the research which was 31.3% from total number. As it is known, pronunciation deals with the way the students produce comprehensible articulation of language learned when they are speaking.

In this case, there were many barriers that hinder the students to speak with good English pronunciation. It was realized that it was difficult enough for a foreign language learner to speak with native-like pronunciation. It is necessary to mention that there are several factors influencing the

pronunciation of the L2 learners. According to Zhang and Yin (2009) the factors could be the first language interference by interference of mother language, learner's age, learner's attitude and psychological, prior pronunciation instruction, and the insufficient language knowledge of English phonology and phonetics.

The last frequency mistake made by students was vocabulary which was 18.1% from total number mistakes. In accordance with the result of the research, the researcher found that most students still used their first language during English class. In this case, there was no an opportunity for them to practice their vocabulary so when they were asked to make a dialogue, they often did not have any idea about what they wanted to talk because since the beginning, the environment had not been created to force them practicing their English skill. Therefore, when they were asked to make a dialogue based on tasks given, it was found that the students tend to combine to use English and Indonesian language when they forgot about the vocabulary of target language or even change into their first language which was Indonesian language when they did not know the words in English because they felt the topic of tasks was difficult enough for them. On the other word, the students used their mother tongue or first language to make their interlocutor understand because the learners who share the same mother tongue tend to use it because it is easier and because learners feel less exposed if they are speaking their mother tongue (Ur, 1996, cited in Ramasari, 2017).

As it was mentioned, those mistakes which were produced by the students did not hamper the

students to maintain communication's flow. This was because the students focused more on conveying message, tried to explain through gesture and also switched the target language into their mother or first language which is Indonesian language. So that, whenever the students found difficulty in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation during the process of delivering or conveying their idea, they would like to speak with their first language. According to Ibarolla and Martinez (2015), they quotes that L1 use has been profusely documented in immersion, second and foreign language contexts and has been recently associated with positive effects when used in peer-peer interaction among children. Since the subjects in the present study share a common L1, all instances in which participants resorted to an Indonesian word during their interaction were coded. On the other word, there was code-switching during the process of interaction when the participants produced mistakes in term of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation which was helpful for the participants in discussion to maintain communication flow. Code-switching is the practice of moving back and forth between two languages, it is a widespread phenomenon in bilingual speech. It was found that code-switching is a quite normal form of bilingual interaction, requiring a great deal of bilingual competence (Muysken, 1995 quoted in Shay, 2015). Most researchers in language research use the term 'bilingual' for users of two languages, and 'multilingual' for three or more. Nevertheless, bilingualism in the present study

deals with the result that English was not the only language the students uttered when they engaged in interaction. Bilingualism could be found when the subject had switched their target language to their first language; it means the subject sometimes used two languages to maintain communication flow as what the negotiation of meaning was meant in this present study.

The last was the third research question, that is, "How is language awareness of students with different level of proficiency in the process of negotiation of meaning?"

In order to answer the third research question, the researcher conducted an interview to all the participants of task discussion which was purposed to obtain deep understanding of students' awareness during the process of interaction. Besides that, the interview was developed based on the student's mistakes result.

The table below describes the students' awareness during tasks discussion.

Table 4. The Analysis of Students' Awareness

Group	Total Number of Mistake	Awareness		Unawareness
		Willingness to correct	Unwillingness to correct	
High – High	61	1	40	20
Low – Low	109	1	14	94
High – Low	73	0	40	33
	243	2	94	147
Percentage	100%	0.8%	38.7%	60.5%

The criteria of students' awareness in correcting a mistake

- 0%-20% = very low
- 21%-40% = low
- 41%-60% = average
- 61%-80% = high
- 81%-100% = very high

The results revealed that the students' awareness to interlocutor mistakes was low. The results showed that the students' awareness willing to correct their interlocutor mistakes without being instructed to do so was very low. It was because there was no direct instruction for them to activate their awareness to language components. Meanwhile, the students' awareness unwilling to correct their interlocutor mistakes was low. It was because most of students were focusing on how to get the point and respond their interlocutor ideas that affected to neglect their interlocutor mistakes. The rest, it indicated the students' unawareness because all mistakes made by interlocutor were not corrected because they did not know how to correct it. It was because the students' lack knowledge to the target language that hampered students to provide correction to the interlocutor mistakes.

In addition, there were several reasons why there was no many corrections given by their interlocutor. It happened because the students focused more on the

conveying meaning and replying the messages. Besides that, an instruction was considered as a necessary element which could be activating and stimulating students' awareness during interaction. Furthermore, the students' personal thought was indicating as the consideration why the students did not correct their interlocutor mistakes because they did not want to make their interlocutor being uncomfortable because of their correction during discussing the tasks.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The findings showed that the students used various ways to express their partial or total lack understanding and react to the interlocutor's signal. Furthermore, the students made many mistakes on the process of interaction which indicated the students with different level of proficiency had a low awareness, 39.5%, to interlocutor mistakes. The rest, 60.5% indicated the students' unawareness because

all mistakes made by interlocutor were not corrected. Therefore, there was no guarantee that interaction focused on negotiation of meaning could help students to obtain comprehensible input if the participants had a low awareness to language learnt.

By providing several tasks which can stimulate the students to interact each other in classroom activity, it might support and develop students' awareness to each language components by providing correction to their interlocutor. This way can be considered to be a good way for students to discover by themselves the pattern and how to use correct grammar, enrich their vocabulary knowledge, and practice their pronunciation in the same time in interactional conversation if the teacher provided an appropriate and clear instruction which considered of what the aim learning English wants to be achieved. On the other words, the teacher should provide a task with an appropriate instruction. It is because through an appropriate instruction, it is easier to focus on what the objective of teaching-learning process in the classroom wants to be achieved through interaction.

REFERENCES

- Al-Mahrooqi, R.I. & Tuzlukova, V. 2011. Negotiation of Meaning in the EFL Context. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities*.
- Arslanyilmaz, A. 2007. *Using Similar Tasks To Increase Negotiation Of Meaning And Language Production In An Online Second Language Learning Environment*. Dissertation (Unpublished). Texas A&M University.
- Bourke, J. 2008. A Rough Guide to Language Awareness. *Teaching Forum: 1: 12-21*.
- Carter, R. 2003. Key Concept in ELT: Language Awareness. *ELT Journal. Oxford: OUP*.
- Champakaew, W. & Pencingkarn, W. 2014. The Effectiveness of Negotiation of Meaning Strategies on EFL Learner's Oral Proficiency Development in Two-way Communication Tasks. *The New English Teacher 8.1*
- Cook, J. 2015. Negotiation of Meaning and Feedback among Language Learners. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 250-257*.
- Flora. 2013. *Negotiation of Meaning: An Analysis of Oral Communication*. Bandar Lampung: Anugrah Utama Raharja
- Gavidia, J.L. 2012. *Using Language Awareness Technique to Improve the Level of Achievement in the English Skills of the Students Taking a Master's Program in Education in a Private University*. Thesis: Universidad De Piura, Lima, Peru.
- Hatch, E. and Farhady. 1982. *Research Design and Statistic for Applied Linguistic*. Los Angeles: Newbury House Publisher.

- Ibarrola, A.L. & Martinez, R.A. 2014. Investigating Negotiation of Meaning in EFL Children with very Low Levels of Proficiency. *International Journal of English Studies (IJES)*.
- Oel, M.V. 2016. *Language Awareness in EFL Grammar Assignments*. Thesis: Nederland B.V.
- Palma, G. 2014. A Classroom View of Negotiation of Meaning With EFL Adult Mexican Pupils. *Sage open April-June 2014: 1-14*
- Perez, A. I. R. 2006. *Implementing A Language Awareness Approach to Grammar Through Topics*. Thesis (Unpublished). Institucion Educativa Comercial Antonio Roldan Betancur (IECARB), Bello.
- Pica, T, Holliday, L., Lewis, N., & Morgenthaler, L. 1989. Comprehensible Output as an Outcome of Linguistic Demands on the Learner. *Studied in Second Language Acquisition, 11, 63-90*.
- Piper, D. 2003. Language Awareness in Nova Scotia Schools: An Exploratory Study. *Brock Education, Acadia University, Vol.13. No.1, 2003*.
- Rahmi, M. & Erlinda, R. 2014. Developing Students' Language Awareness through Discovery Learning in English Language Teaching. *SELT*.
- Ramasari, M. 2017. Students' Pronunciation Error Made in Speaking for General Communication. *Journal of Linguistics, English Education and Art. Vol 1, No. 1*.
- Saenz, D.M.C.. 2016. *Exploring Language Awareness in EFL Second Grades*. Thesis: Universidad Distrital Francisco Jose De Caldas. Communication Strategies: An Interaction-based Study in Turkish EFL Context. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 10(2), 169-182; 2014*.
- Shay, O. 2015. *To Switch or Not to Switch: Code-Switching in a Multilingual Country*. Elsevier Ltd.
- Watanabe, Y. & Swain, M. 2008. Perception of Learner Proficiency: Its Impact on the Interaction Between an ESL Learner and Her Higher and Lower Proficiency Partners. *Language Awareness, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2008*.
- Yang, Y. 2013. Exploring Students' Language Awareness through Intercultural Communication in Computer-supported Collaborative Learning. *Educational Technology & Society, 16 (2), 325-342*.
- Yufrizal, H. 2007. *Negotiation of Meaning by Indonesian EFL Learners*. Bandung: Pustaka Reka Cipta.
- Yufrizal, H. 2008. *An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition*. Bandung: Pustaka Reka Cipta.

Zhang, F. & Yin, P. 2009. A Study
of Pronunciation Problems of
English Learners in China.

*Asian Social Science, Vol. 5,
No. 6.*