

Identifying the Goodness of Students' Conversation with Native Speakers

Dr. Imam Dui Agusalm, M.Pd,

*Electronic Engineering Polytechnics Institute of Surabaya,
JL. Raya ITSSukolilo, Surabaya*

ABSTRACT: Why an English teacher needs to be creative in creating extra activities that support the improvement of speaking skills becomes the focus of this paper. It explores some natural communication for English learners in practicing conversation with native speakers. The conversation data collected from both the utterances of foreigners and students are qualitatively interpreted to find the goodness of communication in the target language in their real communication. The scope of study lies on the texts of oral conversation. It does not analyze the meta-language as it does not become major materials in the language teaching. The findings show both the learners and the foreigners give significant feedbacks on the speaking practice with native speakers which is good recommendation for English teachers.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language belonging to scientific society is considered as the lesson which needs the capacity of memorizing rather than thinking or proving. As a result learners may master the theory, but they are poor in applying it. In fact, speaking is a creative act. Besides, a conversation can be held by any language user, yet reading, writing, preparing speeches and even listening to speeches are far from universal skills. Moreover, even with the most communicative approaches, the second or foreign language classroom is limited in its ability to develop learner's communicative competence in the target language. This is due to the restricted number of exposure to the variety of functions, genres, speech events, and discourse types that occur outside the classroom. Given the limited time, such as once a week, available for learners to practice the target language in the classroom, teachers should also maximize opportunities for learner's participation outside the classroom. Many English teachers have good command of the various techniques of teaching, but the students simply do not know how to go about learning the language. This is due to the fact that learning a language is often outside their experiences; **first**, because learning one's native language was simply a natural part of growing up and **second**, because normally the study of English takes place only with the goal of passing entrance exams and hence the "paper test phenomenon" of concentrating on grammar. So, teachers teaching conversation in Indonesia should focus, on general, in helping the students become **better language learners**.

Questions of the Study: The main problem which will be solved through the qualitative method in this study is that the learners are reluctant to speak up with the target language. The learners are not interested to communicate by using the target language. Meanwhile, the research questions which can appear from the problem of communication can be expressed as follows.

- a. What are the students' problems of making conversation with native speakers?
- b. How does the conversation develop the learners' language communication?
- c. Why do they find problems in the conversation?

Purpose of Study : The common practice of setting up communication activities in which learners spend large amounts of class time speaking to one another and which is preceded or followed by language input from the course book ignores the fact that learners can do this perfectly well in their own time with some friends and a grammar book. It would be obvious that a good language teacher is one who can create an environment in which their learners communicate naturally in the language and are provided with help on how to express whatthey want to say. In order to aid real communication then, teachers must understand the real problems of the learners when they are interacting with the target language on the authentic setting. In other words, this research is done **to increase learners' communication in the use of the target language**.

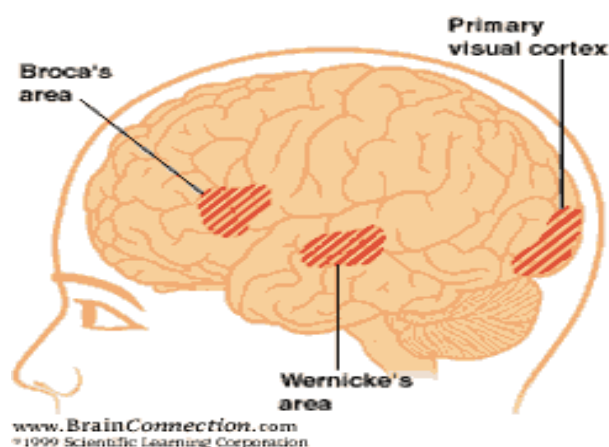
Scope and Limitation of Study: This study just explores the way **how the learners cope with their problems of communication in the target language in their real communication**. The scope of study lies on the texts of oral conversation. It does not analyze the meta-language as it does not become major materials in the language teaching. In fact, most research in the field of speaking gives attention to **a text analysis** rather than spoken styles. These research areas are completely done in **descriptive way** on the characteristics of target language at

the surface level. The analysis which is of natural conversation is to discover what the linguistic characteristics are.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

The Neuro-Linguistic Background: Studies involving sophisticated brain imaging technologies called functional magnetic resonance imaging, fMRI, have also revealed some intriguing patterns in the way human brains process first and second languages. Joy Hirsch and her colleagues¹ at Cornell University used fMRI to determine how multiple languages are represented in the human brain. They found that native and second languages are spatially separated in **Broca's area** that is responsible for the motor parts of language-movement of the mouth, tongue, and palate. In contrast, the two languages show very little separation in the activation of Wernicke's area which is responsible for comprehension of language.

Fig. 1 Brain Anatomy: Lateral brain showing primary visual cortex, Broca's area, and Wernicke's area.



The fMRI studies suggest that **the difficulty adult learners** of a second language may have is not with understanding the words of the second language, but with the motor skills of forming the words with the mouth and tongue. This may explain why learners of a second language can often comprehend a question asked in the new language, but are not always able to form a quick response.

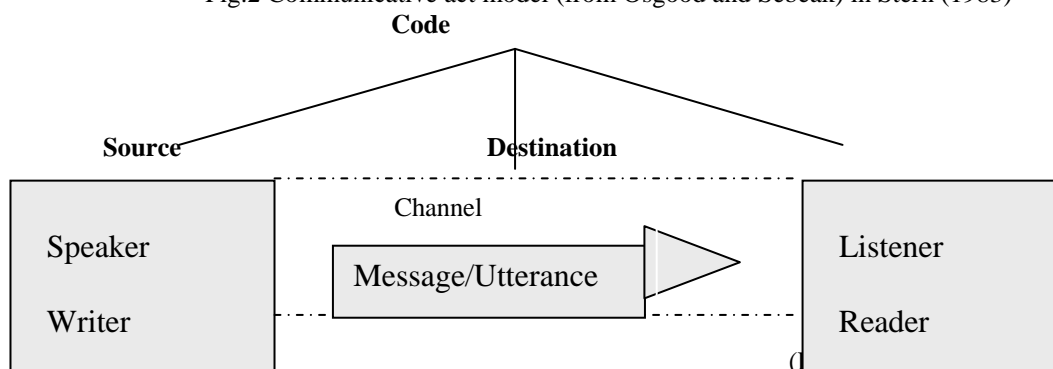
The Linguistic Background: It is often said that language teaching in the past few decades has shifted the emphasis away from mastery of language use to mastery of language structure. Indeed, Hymes says that a major characteristic of modern linguistics takes structure as a primary end in itself, and tends to depreciate use (Brumfit and Johnson. 1986: 8).

The Harms of Critical Period and Model of Communication: There is a well-known concept regarding second-language learning that is there is a critical period which shuts down at the time of puberty. This concept may harm adults who become doubtful of their ability to learn a new language and teachers who become skeptical too as there is a little hope of success. However, the critical period is not a magical tool for creating perfect second-language speakers. Timing, in other words, is not everything. The danger of the concept on critical periods may happen when attention is only given too much to **when learning occurs** and too little attention to **how learning might best occur**.

In fact, the system communication is applied in information theory operating the concept of code (see Figure 2), such as **linguistic code**, in order to send messages. Both sender (source) and receiver (destination) must already be familiar with the code if the message to be sent is to be encoded at the source and to be decoded and understood by the receiver. A language as a system of communication can, minimally, be likened to a '**code**' which is shared by individuals for the purpose of transmitting '**messages**'. Human communication takes place at two levels, at the same time: a message is expected to have a **meaning** and the message is expected to contain **information**. Bennett (1976: 5) remarks 'it seems likely that communication is primarily a matter of speaker's seeking either to inform a hearer of something or to enjoin some action upon him'.

¹ <http://www.brainconnection.com/topics/?main=fa/second-language3>

Fig.2 Communicative act model (from Osgood and Sebeak) in Stern (1983)

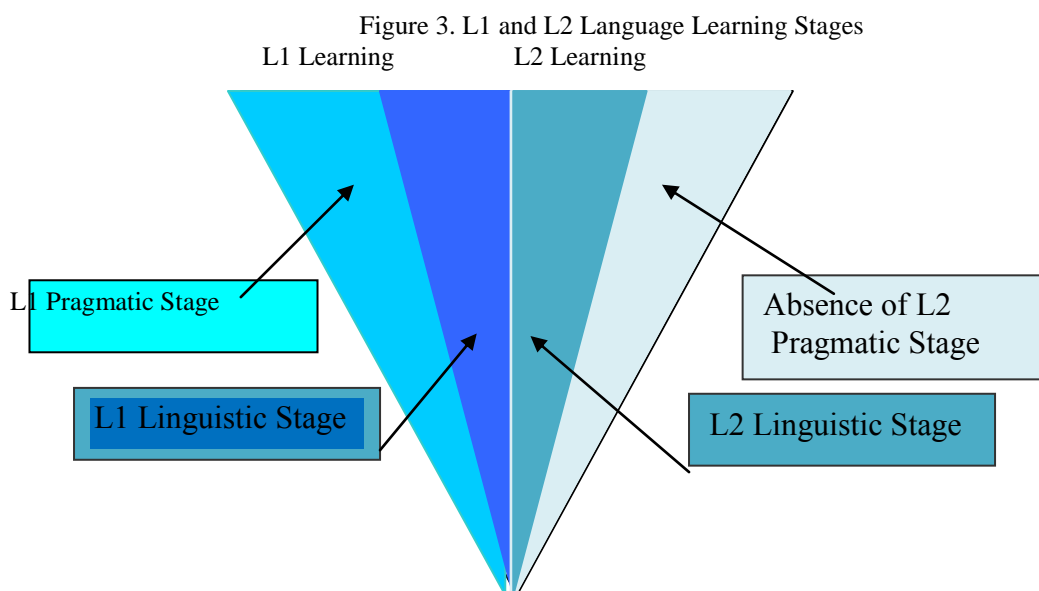


Through the **practice** of transmitting the messages, learners gain a knowledge and understanding of the cultures that use the language.

Pragmatic Competence in Oral Communication :It is necessary to teach pragmatic competence because, for foreign language learners, abilities put the language into practice effectively and efficiently in any given situation in the target language are indispensable. To understand and to be understood in the interaction with speakers of the target language do not only require learner’s knowledge of linguistic competence in its widest sense, but also the knowledge of using the language appropriately or known as **pragmatic competence**. The obvious importance of the appropriateness in language performance is a matter of urgency that foreign language learners must be equipped with the pragmatic competence. **Failure to select appropriate linguistic forms to be used in a given contact may cause communication breakdowns or difficulties.**

Pragmatics also embraces other things such as speech acts. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989: 1) mention that speech acts are “one of the most compelling notions in the study of language use”. This is so because speech act theory is one of the few frameworks proposed to describe and account for language use.

In terms of the language use there is a theoretical gap regarding the foreign language learning.



Swain (1985) even says that an alternative to the comprehensible-input hypothesis is the ‘comprehensible-output’ hypothesis, **which stresses the importance of giving learners opportunity of practicing the target language.** O’grady et al. (1996: 904) in case of second language learning by adults, saying adults can not be said either cognitively or biologically immature. They are subject to an influence that is absent from the child’s situation; the first language itself. This situation is expressed in the diagram below:

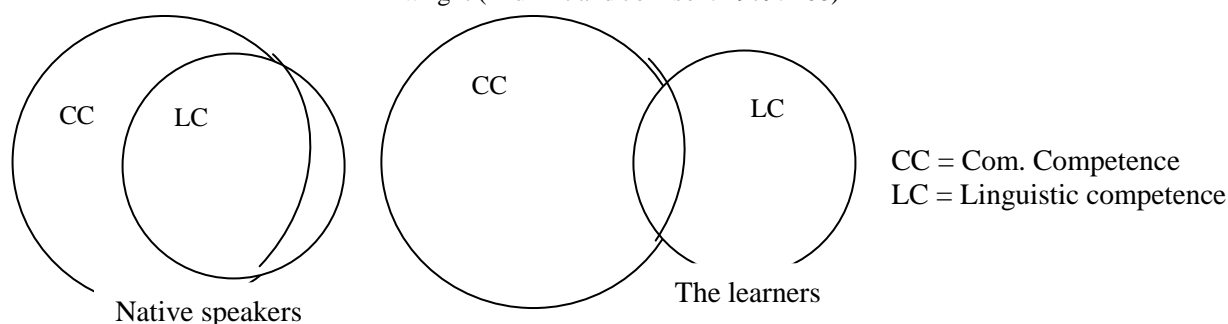
Fig.4 Influences on an Inter-language Grammar in O'Grady et al.(1996: 904)



This diagram illustrates the fact that second language learners have a systematic inter-language grammar – so – called because it is influenced by both the first and the second language and has features of each.

Language Learning through Communication Practices : It has been accepted for many years that communication is the proper aim for language teaching. It is the fact that only lip-service has normally been paid to the aim of communication. It is difficult to prove but perhaps not so difficult to accept. It seems generally accepted that language teaching globally has not led to a satisfactory level of communicative skill in the most cases. Textbooks and national syllabuses present an analysis of language rather than of communicative skill. A logical argument would suggest that if communication is the aim, then it should be the major element in the teaching process. In other words, a language teacher is not teaching language for communication but he is teaching communication via language.

Fig. 5. Relationship diagram between Communicative Competence and Linguistic Competence by Richard Allwright (Brumfit and Johnson. 1979: 168)



What might teaching toward a major focus on communicative skills be like? According to Allwright (in Thumfit and Johnson. 1979) there are three basic elements:

Samples of the target language. :These may or may not be intended as model samples and they may come in spoken form or written form, from teachers, or learners, or teaching materials. They may simultaneously function as guidance.

Guidance concerning the nature of the target language.

Management activities : They are normally designed for the express purpose of controlling the learners' exposure to the 'samples' of target language, and to the forms of 'guidance' thought most appropriate by the teacher. It is normally the teacher, then, who is held responsible for the management of the learners' learning activities.

Problems in Speaking the Target Language: Problems are the term that refers to the particular difficulties in communication using target language when the people in the conversation do not share the same knowledge of the rules governing conversation. The 'difficult' rules may change the smooth and complex coordination of thematic development, turn-taking and topic of communication

III. RESEARCH METHOD

As this study relies on text data of conversation communication, the method of analysis is surely done in **mixed procedures** (Creswell, 2003: 179). The qualitative research takes place in the natural setting. The researcher takes data from natural setting of interview. In addition, Cresswell's description on one of the characteristics of qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. This means that the researcher makes an interpretation of the data. This includes developing a description of an individual or setting, analyzing data for themes or categories, and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about its meaning personally and theoretically, stating the lessons learnt, and offering further questions to be asked. (Creswell, 2003: 182)

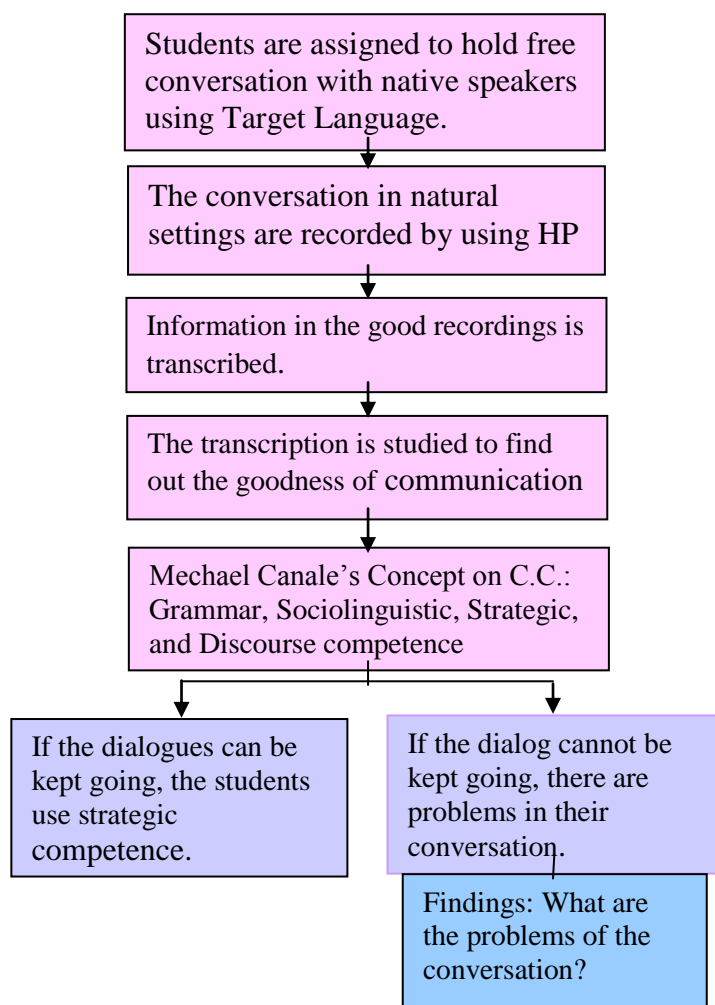
Subjects and Materials of Study: The subjects of the study are students of Politeknik Elektronika Negeri Surabaya ITS. This polytechnic was established under the cooperation of Japanese and Indonesian governments in 1988. The materials used as data sources of the analysis are taken from transcription of some conversations which are conducted by students of electronic polytechnics. Though the materials will be from both sides, the students' and foreigners' utterances that have already been recorded and then transcribed, the main consideration is given to the goodness of their interaction. The data does not involve extra languages or non-verbal communication because they are not major aspect in the teaching learning process.

Instrument of Research: The researcher is the most important instrument of the research. To eliminate the difficulties on communication, he needs to observe the transcript of conversation from the files or CDs which have been done by learners using hand phone, tape, voice or video recorders.

Techniques of Collecting Data: The observation includes students' records of conversation taking a place in public places, and find out the existing benefit in the recorded communication. The recorded conversations which are in the forms of audio or video files are submitted as the sources of data. Since the conversations are done naturally at various places such as on the street, food courts and shopping centers, the results of recording have various quality of sound which influences the number of subjects and determines the amount of data.

The Data Analysis : The transcription of conversation data is analyzed by searching the communicative components: **grammatical competence, socio-linguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence.**

As a whole the research is executed under Figure 6: The Research Framework:



Implementing exercises of making a conversation with tourists or stranger provides students real communication using the target language. Students' motivation is activated by trying to keep their dialogs going on. As the student can inherently maintain his communication, he is freed to invest emotionally in the conversation he made. More importantly, from a pragmatic point of view, the student tends to focus more on correct function of communication of which he do becomes emotionally involved in what heis saying. Take a look at one of his**unedited** comments of the conversation experience with stranger conducted by a learner below:

Two month ago, I have an examination from my lecturer to interview a native speaker from foreign country. I feel so nervous because this is my first experience I meet foreign tourist at Surabaya Plaza and her name is Cindy. When I talking with her, she didn't understand what I'm talking about. But she helping me to give me a question that should I ask her. That **are great experience** for me. It can make me to learn conversation with English language.

Analyzing the transcripts of conversation :Communication problems happen when the learner and the foreigners do not share the same knowledge of rules governing the interview. The learners mostly transfer the rules of his mother tongue into the target language (Inter-language) being used for communication. When the learners make ungrammatical questions the foreigners reply with correctly grammatical answers as if they were repairing the problems of grammar.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The natural conversation isa useful activity for learners who do not major in the target language for the following reasons:

Learners' Comments on the Conversation Experience :The conversation gives the learners **real communication experience** that motivates them to learn the target language. The interview using the target language **develops the learners' interest or happiness to interact** with the foreigners though some of them, in the beginning, feel nervous, afraid, and confused (See comments no. 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10). As a matter of fact that the foreigners are kind and friendly to learners (See comment no. 5, 6, 9) they even help and encourage the learners to express in the right expression (See comments no. 1, 7, 8). Finally, it is stated that the activity for doing conversation is **good for practicing** the target language (See the last sentence in comment no. 6).

Foreigners' Goodness : The foreigner encourages the learner to practice more and more by offering his willingness to be further interviewed 'Do you have more questions?' Besides, foreigners always answer all grammatical error questions with appropriately suitable answers. The foreigner has **initiative to repair** the learner's grammatical problem

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The communication which takes place between the learners and people who have different cultural backgrounds using the Target Language shows various dynamics that result some findings putin the conclusion and suggestion below.

VI. CONCLUSION

The goodness of conversation for the learners are

- 1) They become more initiatively courageous to ask new topics and persistent to ask when they do not understand.
- 2) The foreigners always give good response. They even offer the learner to ask further and try to improve the learners' language by answering grammatically wrong questions with appropriate answers.
- 3) Psychologically, learners are encouraged and interesting to talk making interaction; though, in the beginning they are nervous.

SUGGESTION

- a. Teachers should make students aware that conversation in any language is more than just speaking. It requires the participants to cooperate to keep it moving.
- b. The conversations are task-based activities which provide not only motivation and interest but also real communication experience which is recommended for learners of English who do not major in English.
- c. The conversation suggested toward the goal of successful communication between different cultures should increase the accommodation of **discourse competence**, language beyond the sentence, and Cross Cultural Understanding.

REFERENCES

1. Bennett, J. 1976. *Linguistic Behavior*. Cambridge University Press
2. Blum-Kulka, S. 1982. Learning how say what you mean in a second language: A study of speech act performance of learners of Hebrew as a second language. *Applied linguistics*, 3, 29-59
3. Brumfit, C. J. and Johnson. K. 1986. *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
4. Crewell, John W. 2003. *Research Design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method*. United States of America: Sage Publication
5. Chomsky, Noam 1991. *Deterring Democracy*. London: Verso. 'Language and Mind'. In P.N. Johnson-Leird (ed.), *Ways of Communicating*. London: Cambridge University Press
6. Chrystal. D. 1992. *Prosodic systems and intonation in English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
7. Hutchinson, Tom and Waters. 1987. *English for Specific Purpose*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
8. O'grady, William et al. 1996. *Contemporary Linguistics: An Introduction*. United Kingdom: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd.
9. Richard, Jacket al. 1985. *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics*. England: Longman Group UK Ltd.
- a. <http://www.brainconnection.com/topics/?main=fa/second-language3>