TEACHING TRANSACTIONAL AND INTERPERSONAL CONVERSATION: A CLASSROOM ACTION RESEARCH

Arif Suryo Priyatmojo
Semarang State University
arifsuryo.unnes@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Based on the standard competence of Indonesian's curriculum relating to speaking activities, the students are demanded to express meaning/ messages in both transactional and interpersonal conversation using spoken languages in every context of situation. Two different kinds of conversation have their own characteristics, from which we still encounter students facing difficulties to communicate with others. The study was aimed at describing whether by giving different time allocation for the students to practice doing transactional and interpersonal conversation can impove the students' conversation skills. It is a classroom action research conducted in my own class; the students in a transactional and interpersonal class became the subject of the study. The class consisted of 24 students in the second semester in the academic year of 2012-2013. To collect the data, I used four ways of collecting data in the forms of observation, questionnaire, interview and video recording. Those four different ways of collecting data were used at initial, middle and final teaching learning process to measure the progress of the study. Time allocation was my teaching technique to improve the students conversation skill. Based on the result of the study, I found that time allocation has positive significance for the students' conversation activities. This improvement was validated by involving a critical colleague and research participants. It can be seen that the students could conduct conversations in longer period of times for both transactional and interpersonal conversations using different degrees of formality, topic preferences, language uses, mode, purposes and cultural contexts. This suggests that the students need longer time to practice by which they are able to do conversation with others in very meaningful ways.

Keywords: transactional and interpersonal conversation, time allocation.

INTRODUCTION

Living in academic societies, students need to do communication with others to achieve a number of intended meanings. One form of communication is a spoken activity, like conversation. In doing so, interactants in any conversation are required to meet some elements of communication to be successfully understood by interlocutors. Conversation is defined as a spoken activity, the purpose of which is to arrive at a mutual understanding of the interactants (Hartley, 1993: 22). Conversation is obviously far more than words. Pridham (2001: 2) states that "conversation can take place through

body language, through prosodic features such as intonation, speed, stress and volume even through silence or laughter".

In the second semester of the academic curriculum, the students take a course study namely interpersonal and transcational conversation where the main source material is a book entitled "Speaking Naturally". Referring to kinds of conversation, they have particular characteristics as mentioned by Hartley (1993: 20) that it should be from one individual to another, face to face and the reflect personal characteristics both the form and content. These two distinctive conversation also relate to the definition by Brown and Yule (1983) in Pridham (2001:25) that any conversation appears to be a chat between interactants with their different purposes. In one side, transactional language is used in obtaining goods and service, and on the other side interactional/ interpersonal language is used when people relate to each other to socialize. Hence, it can be inferred that a conversation is a spoken activity done by two individuals that has a purpose either to get things done or to socialize.

Teaching English as foreign language for Indonesian students is quite challenging especially in speaking skill as they are accustomed to speaking using their own native language in any context of situation. They tend to use English in only their nurturing class contexts. As a result, most students can not communicate well in spoken language. One of the causes of this unsatisfactory result is due to the traditional approach used by most teachers. They still focus on sentence construction rather than on functional objective. In recent years, literacy model is introduced by the government to overcome such problems. As stated in this model, four levels are given for different level of students. Performative is addressed to the students of elementary students, functional for the students of junior high school, informational for the students of high school and epistemic for university students (Wells, 1991: 53) in Hammond et al. (1992: 11).

The students doing conversation have objective to communicate with others in very meaningful ways. They are supposed to see the context of culture and the context of situations in order to achieve the intended meanings. Some other ways such as discourse markers, fillers and prosodic features are needed to achieve the meaningful communications. However, it is not that easy for my students to do purposeful and meaningful conversations. Based on my observation in the learning process for the first meetings, constraints faced by the students are elaborated in Table 1.

Table 1. Students' problems in conducting conversation

Most problem indicators	Description
Exposure	The students tend to do such interogation in doing conversation (not in natural way) and it is predictable. Here is an example:
Time	The students were not able to use the allocated time so that they did the conversation in a very quick manner. It is so different when they did this in their native language (Indonesia or Javanese)
Discourse Markers and prosodic features	The students tend to use their own dialect expression of their own languages in spite of English discourse markers. For example, they used "apa itu", "opo kui", "errrrr", "ehmmmm", instead of 'well', 'you know', etc. It makes the conversation unnatural.

It can also be found that most students only produce pairing questions and answers (adjacency pairs). Their utterances are such the predictable structure of a conversation. The students and the teachers quite know the learning goals behind talks in the clasroom, the conversational role the should plan and the structure of conversation accordingly in what Pridham (2001: 6) term as 'speech events'. The students also produced more voiced pauses in their conversation activities such as er, um, ehm, apa itu, etc. where they hesitated.

Morever, I also get evidence the students' problem in conducting conversation. It was based on the questionnaire that I gave at the first meetings. The following are the most common problems based on the students responses:

Table 2. Students's response toward conversation problems

Indicator	1	2	3
Problems of doing conversation	Finding appropriate vocabularies in both conversation	Speaking grammatically	Afraid to make mistake

(taken from nicenet.org)

From those evidence, I as the lecturer consider that the students had constraints in making successful conversations. Hence, I consider how to improve their

competence of doing conversation by using time allotment technique.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design
This study focuses on how to improve students's conversation skill, in which the students' progress of doing conversation become the main indicator of its success. To proceed this, I used Classroom Action Research (CAR) focusing on how to improve students' conversation skill in the learning process in my own class. The followings are research cycles.
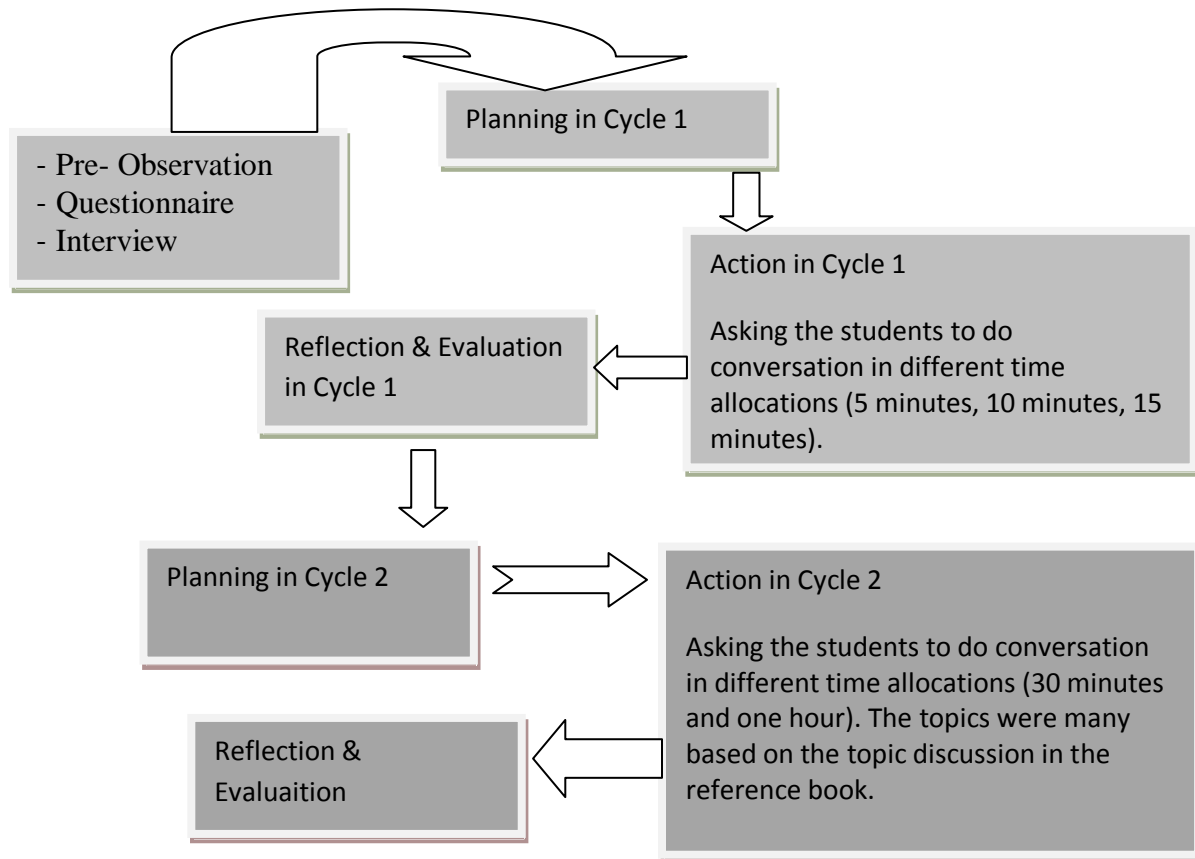
Planning in Cycle 1

- Pre- Observation
- Questionnaire
- Interview

Action in Cycle 1

Asking the students to do conversation in different time allocations (5 minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes).

Reflection & Evaluation in Cycle 1

Planning in Cycle 2

Action in Cycle 2

Asking the students to do conversation in different time allocations (30 minutes and one hour). The topics were many based on the topic discussion in the reference book.

Reflection & Evaluaition

Figure 1 Action Research Cycle
(source: Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988, p. 10)

Subject of the Study
A number of 24 students became the subjects of the study. They are the students from the second semester of the academic year of 2012-2013.

Data Gathering
To gather the data, three instruments were used. The first one is observation; this was used to identify the problems happening in the class. It was based on the direct

observation, and here I observed directly while the teaching and learning process was going on. Next, I used a questionnaire to find out their problems based on their own personal reasons. Then, it was an interview. I used this in order to hearing their deeper reason of such problems they have. The last one is video recording by which I coud get the conversation transcript. The video recording was used in the learning process.

Data analysis and interpretation

1. Collecting the data based on pre-observation, pre-questionnaire, pre-interview and video recording
2. Interpreting the data into evidence
3. Doing the cylces – planning, action, observation, evaluation & reflection
4. Collecting the data based on post-questionnaire and post-interview
5. Interpreting the data into evidence

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on data interpretation, it can be seen that most students had problem in doing conversation both interpersonal and transactional conversation. Furthermore, they had much difficulty in the transactional conversation. To solve such constraints, I used time allocation given for the students before TLP. It was started by giving 5 minutes time, 10 minutes time and 15 minutes time. The students did conversation in pairs with the proposed themes given. They were free topic discussions found from varied media such as video from TED. Com, current issues in news, their own interest, etc. The purpose of which was to arouse students motivation and confidence to speak up in pairs. In doing this, the students were getting accustomed to having fillers and discourse markers to convey their intended meanings. It was quite different from their first meetings in which they still often used Indonesian dialectical expressions. Here, they started to shift from L1 dialectical expressions into L2 expressions. Hence, they started to produce natural and meaningful utterances. The following is one example taken from students conversation:

Transcrip 3
S1: "How's your life?"
S2: "Well, not so bad"
S1: "Hmm, great then. Please tell me your vacation last weekend!"
S2: "You know, it's fantastic huh. *Seems hard to come back to school life*".
S1: "I know that, let's fight for our best this semester".
S2: "Great then, well .... how was Cintia?"

Based on that transcript of conversation above, it can be inferred that two students are having interpersonal conversation. They are in the same level as one another uses very informal, but meaningul language. Both students were also successful in using fillers and discourse markers such as "well", "hmm" and "you know". These are English expression used by the English spaking people to make the conversation meaningful and to make the interactants seem closer. It is such interpersonal conversation as we can not find the most specific topic. The interactants produced some topics such as "vacation", "school life" and "Cintia". We can conclude that they did such conversation in order to socialize.

Another example is taken from a conversation between a student and a teacher as the following:

Transcript 5

S3: "Good morning Sir. I am sorry to bother you, is it possible for me to see you now?"

S4: "Of course. What is it about?"

S3: "I am sorry, I need to see you since I need to get information about my remedial assignment in Academic Writing".

S4: "Yes, well you need to revise your assignment as you did bad in structuring the ideas"

S3: "I am sorry sir, do I need to have another new assignment or just revised the previous one"

S4: "New is better"

S3: " Thank you Sir, I'll do that. I think that it is clear for me what to do"

S4: " You may leave this room and do your work"

S3: " Thank you sir"

S4: "OK"

This is a transactional conversation between a student and a teacher. We can see from the language used by the interactants. In one side, the student (S3) used very grammatical and formal language as his position is lower than the teacher (S4), by which he is supposed to use appropriate language. On the other hand, the teacher (S4) produced informal language as he is superior than the student. It relates to the cultural context of Gerot and Wignell (1994: 10) (who we are, what we say and what we do). Here, the student and the teacher know what to say using different languages. It reflects what the Indonesian people should say in this particular context. It is quite different from the result of the convesation in the first meetings where they still mixed the language use in both kinds of conversation. The students have learned

how to differentiate the language use for different purposes in conversation.

Meanwhile I assumed that I could get better result of my students' conversation if I used a longer allotted time. Hence, I made a plan to have 30 minutes to assign my students to have conversation based on themes or topics found in the reference book we used in the teaching and learning process.

To apply such plan, the students were asked to have conversation both interpersonal and transactional conversation in pairs. Based on the result of the observation in TLP, it can be seen that the students were well motivated in doing conversation because they were actively participating in the class doing the conversation. They also used such fillers and discourse markers to convey their intended meaning by which the messages were achieved by the interlocutors. The students' voices of their interest to use the allocated times can be seen from the followings based on the evidence of the post-questionnaires:

Student 1

"I think that is a good way because by doing practice with period of time we are not only practice to talk, but we also practice how to manage the time in order to control our conversatio with the given topics by our teacher. This thing is especially when we are doing Transactional conversation because in Interpersonal conversation we don't have any specific topics to talk each other. We could talk anything we want "

Student 2

I think it is very good way to improve the student's skill in conversation because we know that not all of the students are practicing to speak English. They just speak a little conversations in English because they still usually use Indonesian language to speak with their friends. Moreover they just speak English in conversation class. Hence, by giving a period of time for students to do conversation practice, it can keep the students to speak up in English

Student 3

"I think it is a very good way to improve the student's skills, especially to make conversations with others. We know that students seldom practice to speak in English in their daily life. They only practice it at college if they're asked by the lecturer first. The students, including me, usually speak in their region languages, in Javanese or Indonesian language, and they will practice more to speak in English in Interpersonal and Transactional Conversation class. So by giving a period of time for students to doing conversation practice, at least it will be able to drill the students to speak in English more often in their daily life".

The Validation Issue

To measure research validity, I included three different voices to triangulate the result finding. They are students' voices, a critical colleague and research expert. They were asked to give their critical

responses upon the research process started from the problem formulation, action reserach cycle and result finding. By accumulating these three different voices, I hope that the result of this research can be accepted by public as a systematic classroom action research. First, most students give their voices related to the techniques I used in the TLP. They said that this technique is great, but need to focus more on transactional conversation as they encountered problems of finding appropriate vocabularies in doing transactional conversation. Then, I also received voice from my critical colleague. He said that I used a nice technique, systematic research, great research progress. Finally I also included research expert related to my research that I conducted. The research expert said I had good problem identification and systematic way to overcome. Furthermore, I need to focus on one particular conversation either transactional or interpersonal to get comprehensive outcome.

CONCLUSION

To have conversation in the target language is quite challenging for the students of Indonesia as they are accustomed to speaking in their native language. Some constraints are faced by the students. We need to have varied technique to improve their competence in doing conversation in the terget language by which they can convey their intended message in very meaning ways. One of which is by giving alloted times for the students as they need to practice with others. By having times the can produce natural English by combining discourse markers, fillers and prosodic features.

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