

An Analysis of Teachers' Questions in English Language Classroom: A Case Study in Year 10 of SMK N 1 Nunukan

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Abstract

In English language classroom, teachers' questions are important parts of teaching English language. Teachers need to know what kind of questions which potentially support students learning target language. However, students did not actively participate in learning particularly when responding teachers' questions. To overcome this problem, it is important for teachers to modify their question through some techniques in order to get students' responses. This study reports the types of teachers' questions used by English teachers in classroom, and the classification of modification questions used by teachers during teaching English language in class.

This research belongs to classroom discourse analysis. The research was conducted at tenth grade of SMKN 1 Nunukan. The data were collected through observation, video recording, and interview. The teachers' questions were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1995) model of qualitative data analysis.

The research findings show that both teachers pose more questions of knowledge level than other levels, and the teachers used various techniques to modify their questions when the students did not give response. The modification of modifying questions are repeating and rephrasing. Then sometimes teachers negotiated questions by in Bahasa Indonesia or first language (local language). The domination of knowledge level questions and how teachers modified the questions is influenced by teachers' competence, students' competence, situation of teaching English language, and teaching material.

Keywords: *modification technique; questions, teachers' questions*

Background

In the classroom, teacher's questioning plays a very important role to initiate teaching and learning. According to Cotton (1988) teacher questions are defined as instructional cues or stimuli that convey students to content element to be learned and directions for answers. Concerning the important of teacher questions in language learning, teacher should know what

kind of questions which potentially support students in learning target language. The emergency of knowing types of questions are based on the reasons that certain short of questions likely trigger students to respond in more complex answer, provide more comprehensible inputs and create more genuine interaction.

A common problem that EFL teachers are facing is to deal with students' participation, where students are unresponsive and avoid interaction with the teacher. This is especially true when a teacher seeks interaction in a teacher-class dialog, such as asking questions to the class as a whole, expecting at least one student to respond. This can be a frustrating experience for both teachers and students. Basically, students often feel reluctant to respond even if they understand the questions, know the answers, and are able to produce the answers. Students, generally, do not respond voluntarily to the instructor's questions and do not participate in class discussions. It is in line with Tan (2007) research claiming that students are reluctant to answer or they really do not know the answer.

To overcome this problem, teachers modify their questions through negotiation of meaning in the form of simplifying, redirecting, paraphrasing, or even translating the questions onto students' first language in such a way that students are expected to give responses more easily.

Literature Review

Teachers' talks mostly relates to questions. Richards and Lockhard (1996:187) concluded that teachers' questions play a crucial role in learning language acquisition. Ideally, questions should stimulate, interest, encourage, focus, help clarify, elicit, help check understanding, all positive achievements.

Teachers' questions are one topic that has attracted many researchers' attention these days (Nunan, 1989). Scholars define questioning lies in the features of questions and of their purpose in classroom interaction. "Much of the work on questions has centered in developing taxonomies to describe the different ways" (Ellis, 1994:587). Several ways of distinguishing on question types have been developed by researchers such as Bloom (1956) and Kearsley (1976). In one of the earliest taxonomies, Bloom (1956, cited in Brown, 2007, p. 172) categorizes questions into the following groups:

1. Knowledge: the recalling of formerly-learned material (e.g. What is the special name of this triangle?)
2. Comprehension: the ability to understand the meaning (e.g. Explain how you got that answer.)
3. Application: the ability to use learned material such as rules, methods, concepts, principles, laws and theories in new and concrete situations (e.g. Give me an example of a situation that you may have this experience.)
4. Analysis: the ability to breakdown material into its elements so that its organizational structure may be understood .This may involve the classification of parts, exploration of the association between them, and identification of organizational principles (e.g. Why did that work in this case?)

5. Synthesis: the ability to collect different parts and put them together to create a new whole. Synthesis encourages learners to form something new and rely on innovative and creative thinking. (e.g. What would happen if you called him?)
6. Evaluation: the ability to assess the value of materials, the explanation to problems or the details about particular cultures (What do you think?)

Research on repetition and rephrasing, the most commonly employed modifications (Chaudron, 1988:127), also appears to give little consensus. The former was found to aid immediate recall (Cervantes, 1983, cited from Chaudron, 1988:156), though immediate recall may not equate to comprehension. Accordingly, he further mentioned there are also doubts as to the efficacy of the latter. He eventually concluded from his analysis that although more research is clearly called for, with more explicit tests of syntactic complexity in L2 listening comprehension, the current results do not look promising. The other factors involved in simplification of input, namely, elaborations by the way of redundancy - restatements, repetition, synonyms, and so on - need to be more extensively examined.

Wait-time is a type of pause in the teacher's discourse and research has found that increased wait-time can be beneficial. Firstly, learners have more time to process the question and to formulate a response (Chaudron, 1988:128). Secondly, more learners attempt to respond (Richards and Lockhart, 1996: 188). Also, "the length and complexity of the response increases" (Holley and King, 1971, cited from Nunan, 1991: 193).

Methodology

This study describes the types of teacher questions and how the classification of modification questions used by teachers in English language classroom. Data of this study were teachers' question during the whole of the teaching-learning process. This research was conducted in the tenth grade at SMK N 1 Nunukan. To get data of teacher questions, this research involved two English teachers from different classes. In this study, the teachers were coded as Teacher A and Teacher B. There were some techniques which the researcher used to collect the data; they were observation, interview, and video recording. In analyzing data from observation, video recording and interview, first of all, the researcher made description of each observation based on the notes taken during the observation. The result of the description was used to get more detail context when classify types of questions and interpreting the meaning of certain utterance. After having the description, the next step was transcribing the data from video-recording.

After having the transcription, then the researcher classified the utterance into two categories, teacher questions category and modification of teacher question. After all the utterances categorized, the researcher classified all the teacher's questions based on the taxonomy of question adapted from the framework of Bloom taxonomy (2001). The next step was categorizing the techniques of modifying question used by the teachers based on Chaudron (1988) framework.

Findings and Discussion

1. Types of teachers question

Bloom proposed six types of questions which teachers can use in classroom they are knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Below is the table of frequency and percentage of the occurrence of questions used by Teacher A and Teacher B.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage of the occurrence of Teacher A and Teacher B questions

Teachers	Types of Question based on Bloom taxonomy.	Frequency and percentage of Occurrence of questions			
		First meeting	%	Second meeting	%
A	Knowledge	19	73.07%	25	69.44%
	Comprehension	6	9.84%	11	30.55%
	Application	-			
	Analysis	-			
	Synthesis	-			
	Evaluation	-			
	Overall	26	100%	36	100%
B	Knowledge	15	83.33%	11	61.11%
	Comprehension	3	16.66%	8	44.44%
	Application	-			
	Analysis	-			
	Synthesis	-			
	Evaluation	-			
	Overall	18	100	18	100%

Table 1 shows that during the teaching and learning process teachers posed a lot of questions in the classroom, this is in line with Chaudron (1988) stated that 20%-40% of class talks are questions. Based on Bloom taxonomy, two teachers used various questions in their teaching and they were categorized into knowledge level and comprehension level.

Based on Table 1, it is found that Teacher A and Teacher B posed a lot of questions which were at knowledge level and several questions at comprehension level. Both teachers never used question regarding to application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation in classroom. It happened because the teachers often asked students to recognize or to recall students' knowledge.

Based on the research findings, the teachers posed a lot of questions at knowledge level, it is in line with Gall (1970) saying that about 60 percent of teachers' questions required students to recall facts; about 20 percent require students to think; and the remaining 20 percent are procedural. There are some reasons why the questions of knowledge level dominated in this study, they are (1) teachers' competence in teaching English language, (2) Students' competence in learning English Language, (3) the situation of teaching and learning, (4) the material of lesson. The following paragraphs describe the reasons why teachers posed a lot of knowledge level questions.

Based on the observation, both teachers have a lack of skill in teaching English language, especially in giving a question to students. Teachers only focused on recognizing and recalling students' knowledge. They did not pose questions which need students to think higher. How the teacher posed question the classroom reflected the teachers' competence in teaching. It is in line with Alkhaleefah (1996), who saying that classroom questions were considered as an important skill in teaching because they reflect teachers' capability and competence in formulating and directing questions to students at a level that evokes their interest, and dealing with their reactions, since teachers develop their positive from anxiety and fear. Besides, Thompson (as cited in Walsh, 2011) stated that the need of language teaching professional to ask appropriate questions and emphasizes the complexity attached to good questions.

In addition, students' competence gave impact to teachers posed types of teachers' questions in the classroom. Based on the observation, it is found that students were not interested in learning English language, and they have low motivation in learning English language. It can be seen from their response to the teachers' questions and their achievement in learning English language. William and Burden (cited in Nurhayati, 2008) stated that learning was possible to occur when people want to do it. In addition, students' background is also influenced the students' competence in learning English language, such as their parents' education background and profession.

The situation of teaching and learning English language also influenced the teachers in asking questions in the classroom. Based on the interview, time was one of the things that affected teachers in asking questions. The teachers mentioned that they did not have much time to ask a lot of questions in the classroom. The teachers only focused on asking students to recall what they already learnt in previous study. When the students were able to recall their knowledge, the teachers assumed the students have understood all the material.

In this research, the material of lesson was about describing persons. The teachers focused on recognizing and recalling students' vocabulary and their knowledge of descriptive text. It is in line with the result of research by Zaennudin (2016) at Vocational High School in Lembar Lombok concluding that the discrepancy of using types of questions was caused by the material and approach of teaching. The use of authentic material and classroom discussion technique facilitates the teachers to use types of questions.

Based on the finding, it can be concluded that the teachers' questions is influenced by teachers' competence in teaching English, students' competence, the situation of teaching and learning English language, and the material of lesson. It is in line with the result of research by Swift (2004) who reported that the presence of significant positive relation between teacher effectiveness in lesson explanation, method in asking questions, and their competence in teaching.

2. Modifications of Teachers question

According to the classification of modification which is proposed by Chaudron (1988), data analyzed were analyzed. One technique was not classified is translation of speech into Bahasa Indonesia, which is also studied here. The result is shown in the following Table.

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of the occurrence of modification of teachers' questions

	Meeting	Modification of teacher questions				Total numbers of questions
		Repeating	%	Rephrasing	%	
Teacher A	M1	3	11.53%	1	3.84%	26
	M2			2	5.55%	36
Teacher B	M1	3	16.6%	1	5.55%	18
	M2	3	16.6%	1	5.55%	18

Table 2 shows that both teachers employ same technique in modifying their questions. There are two techniques teachers used, they are repeating and rephrasing technique. In the first meeting, Teacher A used repeating techniques for about 3 questions or 11.53% (26 questions), and she rephrased her question only one time. In second meeting, from a total of number 36 questions which posed by the teacher, it is not found that Teacher A repeated her question; she only modified her question by rephrasing. Accordingly, Teacher B repeated her question three times from a total number of questions 18 questions. Then, she modified her questions only one time. In the second meeting, it is found that Teacher B used repeating techniques three times. In brief, teacher B only used one time rephrasing technique in second meeting.

Based on the research finding, the repeating and rephrasing technique used by the teacher A and teacher B were an average 3 questions or 33%. This was counter to Chaudron's result of

research (Chaudron 1988:127) “predominant modification technique. This happened because there was much work to do in class, and the teacher wanted to save more time to complete the task or lesson.

Based on taxonomy of modification techniques, data collected were analyzed. But one question modification not classified is the most obvious – translation of L1. From the research findings, the teachers translated their questions into Bahasa Indonesia in order to make sure the students understand and teachers failed to maintain the question.

In this research, the wait time after each questions was shorter than in other teaching contexts (Holley and King proposed 5 second or more (Chaudron, 1988:128) such as one or two seconds on average. There were many cases when the teachers translated the question into first language instead of waiting students’ responses. Teachers asked many questions to the whole of class and to individual student without long pauses as she circulating among the class. The reasons for this perhaps that teachers need more time to finish their large amount of planned work keeping pace with teaching plan and most of students were inactive when needed to speak English in the classroom.

Conclusion

Problems are revealed in teachers’ questioning. First, teachers are not fully aware of the effects of teachers’ questioning on classroom interaction. Second, they paid little attention to the strategies of questioning in the classroom interaction. As a result, the teachers’ questioning is only a focused on recalling and recognize students’ knowledge. It cannot really stimulate students’ initiatives, nor can it develop their interactive competence. However, putting the skill into practice should not be the final aim of the English teacher. They should devise questions carefully, considering the specific situations and using them correctly in class

For further research, other researchers are recommended to conduct a research which can describe what makes teachers use lower cognitive questions than higher cognitive questions, or how to use questioning strategy to improve students’ cognitive thinking.

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