EFL Learners' Task-Generated Interactive Discourse

Abstract

This study investigated the use of different communicative tasks in promoting oral language development among English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in a Malaysian setting. It also examined the nature of oral discourse generated through the use of three distinct communication task types i.e. information-gap, jigsaw and decision-making.

Eighteen EFL undergraduates from a public university participated in this study. Full learner interactions recorded during the execution of each task type were transcribed verbatim. The oral discourse was then qualitatively analysed with a special focus on episodes of negotiated interactions, language related episodes (LREs) and learners' uptake of language input.

The findings showed that learners generated episodes of negotiated interactions when engaged in all three task types. However, the depth of the negotiated interactions differed between the different tasks. When engaged in the information-gap task completion, they demonstrated a procedural approach which included interaction episodes related to handling, organising and executing the task. However, when engaged in the jigsaw and decision-making task completion, they demonstrated an exploratory approach resulting in episodes of joint meaning-making, joint investigation, questioning and reasoning, problem solving and intense negotiation. In addition, data indicated emergence of collaborative dialogues and LREs in the learner interactions especially in the jigsaw and decision-making task types.

The results of this study seem to provide empirical evidence that language communication tasks do promote meaningful interactions among Malaysian EFL

undergraduates. Data clearly showed widespread generation of interaction episodes during task completion which evolved into LREs and became uptake of language input. These strongly suggest the existence of language learning opportunities and possibility of language development. Language communication tasks when effectively executed in a tertiary EFL setting can encourage meaningful oral discourse and expose learners to novel interaction episodes which are essential in language learning and acquisition.

Interaksi Pelajar Efl Ketika Melaksanakan Tugasan Komunikatif

Abstrak

Kajian ini menyiasat penggunaan tugasan komunikatif yang berbeza dalam menggalakkan pembangunan keupayaan lisan dalam kalangan pelajar yang berada dalam persekitaran bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) di Malaysia. Ia juga mengkaji jenis wacana lisan yang dihasilkan ketika melengkapkan tiga tugasan komunikasi iaitu *information-gap, jigsaw* dan *decision-making*.

Lapan belas pelajar EFL dari sebuah universiti awam telah terlibat dalam kajian ini. Interaksi pelajar ketika melengkapkan setiap tugasan direkodkan sepenuhnya dan ditulis dalam bentuk transkripsi. Perbualan yang terhasil itu dianalisis secara kualitatif dengan tumpuan khas kepada episod interaksi berbentuk rundingan, episod interaksi berkaitan bahasa (*Language Related Episodes* - LREs) dan penerimaan serta penguasaan input bahasa oleh pelajar.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan pelajar memaparkan episod interaksi rundingan bagi ketiga-tiga tugasan. Bagaimanapun, tahap penggunaan interaksi rundingan berbeza antara satu tugasan kepada tugasan lain. Ketika melengkapkan tugasan *information-gap*, interaksi yang dihasilkan pelajar berbentuk pendekatan prosedur (procedural approach) yang merangkumi pengendalian, penyusunan dan pelaksanaan tugas. Bagaimanapun, ketika melaksanakan tugasan *jigsaw* dan *decision-making*, mereka mempamerkan pendekatan penerokaan (exploratory approach) yang membawa kepada penghasilan episod pencarian makna secara bersama, siasatan bersama, persoalan dan pertimbangan, penyelesaian masalah, dan rundingan intensif. Selain itu, data menunjukkan kewujudan

dialog bekerjasama (*collaborative dialogue*) dan LREs dalam interaksi pelajar terutama dalam tugasan jigsaw dan *decision-making*.

Hasil kajian ini menyediakan bukti empirikal bahawa tugasan komunikatif sememangnya menggalakkan interaksi yang bermakna dalam kalangan penuntut universiti EFL di Malaysia. Data ini juga menunjukkan dengan jelas penzahiran episod interaksi ketika melengkapkan tugasan yang diberikan bertukar kepada LREs dan penerimaan dan penguasaan input bahasa. Semua ini menyokong kewujudan peluang pembelajaran dan penguasaan bahasa. Tugasan komunikatif bahasa apabila dilaksanakan secara efektif dalam persekitaran EFL di peringkat pengajian tinggi boleh menggalakkan perbualan bermakna dan mendedahkan pelajar kepada episod interaksi baru yang penting dalam pembelajaran dan penguasaan bahasa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All praises to Almighty Allah, the most merciful and the most benevolent for granting me the strength to embark on this journey.

This has been a really long journey, with a lot of ups and downs. I am forever thankful to many.

- I have been fortunate to have Associate Professor Dr. Juliana Othman as my supervisor. Her encouragement, support and most of all, patience has motivated me to move forward and persevere. Thank you for the faith you have in me.
- My participants, for their willingness to sacrifice their time.
- My parents, for their unwavering support.
- Aainaa Nasha and Redza Hakimi, for their understanding that mommy is often 'lost'.
- Mohamad Azlan Jaafar, for putting up with everything. Thank you for believing in me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
SYNOPSIS	ii
SINOPSIS	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
LIST OF TABLES	xiv
LIST OF APPENDICES	xv

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Background of the Study	1
1.3	Statement of the Problem	3
1.4	Objectives of the Study	7
1.5	Research Questions	8
1.6	The Framework	8
1.7	Significance of the Study	19
1.8	Definition of Terms	20
1.8.1	English as a Foreign Language (EFL)	20

1.8.2 Tasks 20

1.8.2.1 Information-gap Task 21

1.8.2.2 Jigsaw Task 21

1.8.2.3 Decision-making Task 22

1.8.3 Negotiation for Meaning (NfM) 22

1.8.4 Language Related Episodes (LREs) 23

1.8.5 Uptake of Language Input 23

1.9 Chapter Summary 24

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE RELATED

2.1 Introduction 25

2.2 Interaction Hypothesis 25

2.2.1 Negotiation of Meaning (NfM) and the Interaction Hypothesis 27

2.3 Output Hypothesis 28

2.4 Interaction and Output Hypotheses 32

2.5 Tasks 33

2.5.1 Task Types 34

2.6 Evidence of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) through

Communication Tasks 39

2.6.1 Tasks and Negotiated Interaction 40

2.6.2 Investigating the Use of Tasks in EFL Contexts 50

2.6.3 Tasks and Collaborative Dialogues 55

2.6.3.1 Form-focused Tasks 57

2.6.3.2 Communication Tasks 61

2.6.3.3 Section Conclusion 67

2.6.4 Tasks and Language Acquisition 69

2.7 Chapter Summary 75

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction 77

3.2 The Study 77

3.3 Research Design 78

3.4 Research Site 79

3.5 The Participants 80

3.5.1 Profile of Participants 82

3.5.1.1 The Blue Team 82

3.5.1.2 The Brown Team 83

3.5.1.3 The Red Team 84

3.6 Tasks 86

3.6.1 Selection of Communication Task Types 87

3.6.2 Task Completion 89

3.6.2.1 Information-gap Task Type 89

3.6.2.2 Jigsaw Task Type 91

3.6.2.3 Decision-making Task Type 92

3.7 Data Collection 94

3.7.1 Pilot Study 94

3.7.2 Actual Study 94

3.7.2.1 Procedures 95

3.7.2.2 Study Constraints 96

3.8 Analysis of Data 98

3.8.1 Data Coding and Analysis 99

3.8.1.1 Research Question 1 100

3.8.1.2 Research Question 2 104

3.8.1.3 Research Question 3 105

3.9 Trustworthiness 109

3.10 Chapter Summary 111

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Introduction 112

4.2 Research Question 1 114

4.2.1 Interactional Modifications 116

4.2.2 Engaging in Task Completion 121

4.2.3 Negotiated Interaction 131

4.2.4 Summary of Findings on Research Question 1 143

4.3 Research Question 2 147

4.3.1 Language Related Episodes (LREs) 148

4.3.2 Lexical LREs 150

4.3.3 Grammatical LREs 161

4.3.4 Orthographic LREs 166

4.3.5 Summary of Findings on Research Question 2 168

4.4 Research Question 3 170

4.4.1 Modifying Lexis 171

4.4.2 Modifying Form 178

4.4.3 Modifying Spelling 182

4.4.4 Summary of Findings on Research Question 3 184

4.5 Chapter Summary 187

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction 190

5.2 Summary of the Main Findings 190

5.3 Research Question 1 194

5.3.1 Learners' Oral Discourse 194

5.3.1.1 Procedural to Exploratory 195

5.3.1.2 Negotiated Interactions 199

5.4 Research Question 2 211

5.4.1 Collaborative Dialogs 211

5.4.1.1 Emergence of LREs 212

5.4.1.2 LREs and Language Learning Opportunities 213

5.5 Research Question 3 224

5.5.1 Uptake of Language Input 224

5.5.1.1 Uptake of Language Input and Language

Acquisition 225

5.6 Section Conclusion 230

5.7 Contributions, Implications and Recommendations 232

5.7.1 Negotiated Interactions 233

5.7.2 Collaborative Dialogues 236

5.7.3 Task Types 238

5.7.4 Use of L1 242

5.8 Limitations of the Study and Further Suggestions 243

5.9 Chapter Summary 246

References 248

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3.1 A Roadmap - Answering the Research Questions 108

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Communication Task Types for L2 Research and Pedagogy Analysis Based On Interactant (X/Y) Relationship Requirements in Communicating Information (INF) to Achieve Task Goals	36
Table 3.1	Profiles of Participants	86
Table 3.2	Task Types Used in the Study	89
Table 3.3	Chronological Procedures of Data Collection	96
Table 3.4	Transcription Conventions	99
Table 3.5	Description of Categories	102
Table 3.6	Categories of Language-Related Episodes (LREs)	105
Table 3.7	Categories of Uptake of Language Input	107
Table 4.1	Duration of Task Completion	113

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Information-gap Task (How to Use a Nasal Spray - IG1)

Appendix 2 Jigsaw (Newspaper Jigsaw - J1)

Appendix 3 Jigsaw (Picture Dictation - J2)

Appendix 4 Decision-making (Accident - DM1)

Appendix 5 Decision-making (Global Issues - DM2)

Appendix 6 Consent Letter to Participants

Appendix 7 Analytical Framework of Peer-Group Interaction

Appendix 8 Excerpts of transcriptions on teams' learner interaction using IG1

Appendix 9 Excerpts of transcriptions on teams' learner interaction using J1

Appendix 10 Excerpts of transcriptions on teams' learner interaction using J2

Appendix 11 Excerpts of transcriptions on teams' learner interaction using DM1

Appendix 12 Excerpts of transcriptions on teams' learner interaction using DM2

Appendix 13 List of abbreviations