Interactional Modifications for Comprehensible Input: *A Case Study of Two EFL Teachers*

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Abstract—**This study aims to investigate the use of interactional modifications proposed by Long (1983) by two English teachers and language learning opportunities obtained. The study found out the distribution and the form of interactional modification in two different levels of English proficiency, elementary and pre-intermediate. To answer the research questions, a case study was adopted. The main data were six transcribed classroom interactions of six sessions with audio-video recording. From the analysis, it was found that elementary teachers modified more interactions compared to pre-intermediate teachers due to less capability of the lower student to comprehend the information delivered. The form of interactional modification used was other-repetition strategy, where both of the teachers repeated student`s utterances frequently to clarify, confirm, or emphasize the initial utterances. Besides, the occurrences of interactional modifications were considered to be determined by several factors, such as the student`s level of proficiency, the material delivered, and the teacher`s knowledge. As for the question of language learning opportunities, the findings revealed by modifying the interaction gaps were noticing where the teacher noticed the mistakes of student`s language used by bringing that gap into awareness. Besides, modified interactions also gave the student the chance for meaning negotiation where the understanding of information was obtained through resolving the communication breakdown in the classroom.**

Keywords: interactional modification, comprehensible input, language learning opportunity, classroom interaction

I. INTRODUCTION

In the EFL context, learners are likely to receive input from teacher and interaction in the classroom. Good input is obtained when students comprehend the words uttered (Kramsh, 1982). Comprehensible input is laid on the "Input Hypothesis" proposed by Krashen (as cited in Kramsh, 1982) which stipulates that for learners to effectively acquire the foreign language, the massive exposure toward comprehensible input is essential.

Comprehensible input can be obtained through modification. It usually takes place when there is a breakdown in communication that interlocutors attempt to overcome (Richards & Schmid, 2002). Tsui (1995) argues the input that best facilitates comprehension and interaction is the modified one. In other words, the input should be adjusted to make it comprehensible and available for student cognitive level (Kumaravadipelu, Pinter, Cameron, & Chaudron, as cited in Rahayu, 2013) since the development of learner inter-language depends much on the comprehensible input (Krashen, as cited

in Hasan, 2008). Therefore, classroom interaction as the main source of student input ought to be comprehended in consideration of better language acquisitions.

One of the ways to identify the way and pattern of teacher modification is through observing the implementation of interactional modification devices proposed by Long (1981) in his interaction Hypothesis. However, in the context of EFL, there is a very limited number of researches that have focused and emphasized the importance of interactional modification to be optimized by the teacher in the classroom along with its language learning opportunity that could be obtained through modifying the speech.

Therefore, the investigation of interactional adjustment is considered as the paramount notion with two basic justifications. Firstly, the identification of specific features used will contribute to the acknowledgment and evaluation of whether or not the adjustment is making the input rather comprehensible for the learner. Secondly, regarding the clear-cut awareness of teachers on linguistic features, exposing the characteristic of interactional adjustment characteristics will at least avoid them using the adjustment solely based on intuitive feel that the utterance is simple or complex. Therefore, to be able to achieve the aim of the research, the following research questions were posed: (1) How does the teacher modify the interactions in the classroom for student`s comprehensible input at elementary and pre-intermediate level? (2) What are language learning opportunities identified from the use of interactional modification devices?

II. METHOD

This present research implemented a case study as the research design. This research was based on the teaching English classrooms by two EFL teachers. The data were consecutively taken in six meetings of two different EFL classrooms respectively. Each of the sessions discussed the different materials. The videos taken were transcribed and coded for the irretrievability and transparency of the data. The process of transcription adopted the Conversation analysis (CA) which known as Jefferson`s System of Transcription Notation (Jefferson, 2004). After the data was coded, the analysis started to investigate the modified interaction used by the teacher employed the frameworks in Table I. The analysis identified the utterances that belong to certain interactional modification features. Each category was subsequently totaled to see the contribution of each modification features. The interactional modifications existed and there were several features that occurred in the significant amount.

TABLE I.   MODIFICATION DEVICES PROPOSED BY LONG 1983B (AS CITED IN TSUI-PING, 2016)

No.	Type	Example
1.	Comprehension Check	"Right? " "Okay?" "Do you understand?"
2.	Clarification Request	"Hm?" "What do you mean?" " You mean"
3.	Confirmation Check	S: "Carefully" T: "carefully?"
4.	Other Repetition	: "okay, give me the sentence" S: "can you help me?" T: "yes, can you help me, please. Good"
5.	Self-Repetition	A: "I think she has a lot of money" B: "But we don't know that?" A: "But her husband is very rich"

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Interactional Modification Distributions*

Table II contains the numbers and the percentages of each of the six interactional modifications feature across three classroom interactions for each teacher at each language proficiency level for 2x100 minutes observation. The main result in Table II reveals the comparative exposure between elementary and pre-intermediate teachers through observing their interactions, especially the kinds and the quantities of modifications used. However, the frequencies of interactional modification`s occurrences were higher in elementary compared to the pre-intermediate classroom in total.

TABLE II.   INTERACTIONAL MODIFICATION DISTRIBUTION IN ELEMENTARY AND PRE-INTERMEDIATE CLASSES

No	Interactional Modification	Elementary						Pre-intermediate					
		EA1		EA2		EB		PA1		PA2		PB	
1	Clarification Request	191	31%	43	37%	126	28%	104	33%	138	35%	96	35%
2	Confirmation Check	84	14%	9	8%	88	20%	43	13%	51	13%	24	9%
3	Comprehension Check	99	16%	13	11%	36	8%	41	13%	42	11%	31	11%
4	Other Repetition	200	33%	39	33%	165	37%	122	38%	144	36%	107	39%
5	Self-Repetition	35	6%	13	11%	35	8%	10	3%	20	5%	17	6%
		609		117		450		320		395		275	
	Total	1220						1033					

In elementary classrooms, the total of interactional modifications were 1220 times. They were used for 633 times in class EA1 (which was the highest among the other classes), 120 times in class EA2, and 467 times in EB. In the course of the pre-intermediate, the total of modified interactions was 1033 times. They were used for 332 times in class PA1, 414 times in PA2, and 287 times in PB.

It revealed the fact about the number of modifications devices that occurred in elementary class was higher compared to the pre-intermediate classroom. Interactional modifications existed frequently at the lower level. Tsui-Ping (2016) believes the amount of modification is the indication for the number of negotiation work in the classroom.

Therefore, the input received by the elementary level was higher than the pre-intermediate one. The findings were in line with the statement from Doughty & Pica (as cited in Tsui, 1995) where they saw the tendency of the teacher who taught the lower class to modify the interaction was higher due to the less capable of the student to comprehend the information and their need of more interlanguage. Lastly, interactional modification occurrences were attached to the amount of teacher talk in the classroom. Whereas in EA2, teacher talk was very low in the amount because, during the day, classroom activity required the student to perform role-play. Therefore, modified interaction decreased to the lowest number compared to the other classes. In support of this, Holland & Shortall (1998) explain that mostly teacher talk consists of questions (display/referential). The purpose of it might be for checking comprehension and asking for clarification. The distribution of each interactional modification strategies can be seen in Table III.

TABLE III.   THE NUMBER OF INTERACTIONAL MODIFICATION OCCURRENCES

Interactional Modifications	Elementary		Pre-Intermediate	
	Occurrences	Percentage	Occurrences	Percentage
Clarification Request	338	34%	360	31%
Confirmation Check	118	12%	181	15%
Comprehension Check	114	12%	148	13%
Other Repetition	373	38%	404	34%
Self-Repetition	47	5%	83	7%
Total	990		1176	

Table III contains the numbers and the percentages of each of the six interactional modifications features. The result indicated that modification occurred heavier in the lower level. This phenomenon can be considered as natural. Because of elementary needs more comprehensible input then pre-intermediate level due to their capability in understanding teacher instruction. This finding supported the previous study conducted by Doughty & Pica (as cited in Tsui, 1995) where they saw the tendency of the teacher to negotiate more meaning in the lower level of proficiency was higher. Besides, the similarity and difference between elementary and pre-intermediate classes were found. For the similarity, both levels were very consistent in determining the position of each device. For example, both levels put other repetition as the most frequent strategy used and self-repetition were the least.

Teacher`s selection of language instruction influences the complexity of student`s language and to some extent, the level of difficulty of the material presented (Suherdi, 2013). To ease student`s understanding, another repetition was the most frequent strategy used by the teacher in both levels of proficiencies. According to Suherdi (2009) repetition usually

used by the teacher as a response to irrelevant responses given by the students. This finding supported the study conducted by Peñate and Bazo (1998) which found out that repetitions were one of the main interactional modifications used by the teacher in the classrooms. This strategy is very useful to consolidate what is being learned. The teacher repeated the student`s utterances with the exact form of preceding utterances or only partial (keyword) of the utterances. It was also utilized at the moment when the teacher wants to reinforce the initial student words, to show the student that the initial words were true, to repair the mispronounce words, or to repair the grammar issues.

B. Clarification Requests

It is an expression that elicits clarification of the preceding utterance (Pica & Doughty, 1988). It requires the addressee to clarify the utterance that had been uttered by the speaker.

The teacher used a very simple form of clarification request in elementary class compared to the pre-intermediate level. This finding leads to the assumption that to optimize student`s comprehension, not only the adjustment on the interaction but also the form of language is needed in requesting clarifications. Since language also affects students' understanding. For the lower level of proficiency class, lack of vocabulary became the biggest barrier for them to optimally understand the information. Secondly, the occurrence of clarification requests in the class where the teacher taught the same material for the second time was decreased. Thus, the use of clarification requests was affected by the level of student`s proficiency, the material presented, and teacher preference or style in teaching.

C. Confirmation Checks

It is an expression designed to establish whether the speaker`s preceding utterance has been understood or correctly heard by the addressee. According to Martin (cited in Suherdi, 2013), confirmation belongs to suspending systems in a dynamic system. It means, this strategy usually uses as `a kind of tracking device- they focus on the experiential content of an initial move and check whether it has been received properly.

The confirmation check by repeating the information is very helpful not only for checking the accuracy of it, but also to correct the possible format of the information given. The occurrence of clarification requests in the elementary class where the teacher taught the same material for the second time was increased. The result contradicted the pre-intermediate level, where teacher confirmation was less in the second class. It can be concluded that there was another factor that determined such a phenomenon.

D. Confirmation Checks

It is an expression designed which manages to establish whether the speaker`s preceding utterance has been understood or comprehended by the addressee or not. This never rarely occur in the opening session of six observed class but mostly during or after the teacher`s explanation or presentation.

Both levels utilized comprehension checks. However, firstly, in terms of form, the elementary teacher used mostly the typical expressions to check student's comprehension while the higher-level teacher employed more very expression to check for comprehension. Besides, the elementary teacher sometimes utilized the Indonesian language to check for comprehension. Secondly, the occurrence of comprehension checks in both elementary and pre-intermediate class where the teacher taught the same material for the second time was decreased. It can be assumed that since the level was the same, the probability of understanding level can be measured based on previous experience in the previous class.

E. Repetition of Other`s Utterances

It is the strategy when the teacher repeats words/paraphrases of some part of the learner`s utterance to help them overcome the communication problems or establish or develop the topic of conversation. It is the most frequent strategy employed in the classroom by the teacher. Long (1981) has also found that repetition is contributive to language acquisition through repairing the discourse when the breakdown in communication occurs. Besides, Games in Hasan (2008) stipulates that repetition is a recurrent technique thought that potentially accelerating effect on language acquisition by repeating the preceding utterance.

Firstly, the forms of other repetitions used in the classroom were partial, expansion, or the same format of the student`s sentences. Secondly, other repetitions were also employed as the moment where the student received a lot of implicit feedback. As stated by Mackey (cited in Khadidja, 2010) that implicit feedback utilized by the teacher includes the repetition of student`s utterances by the teacher along with changing one or more sentence components as the correction. The contributions of other repetition toward providing comprehensible input toward the learners in learning language were revealed. Besides, there were no specific differences in both levels of proficiency. Thirdly, the use of other repetition was affected by material presented, the level of student English proficiency, and the teacher`s need for doing the student`s repetitions.

F. Repetition of Self Utterances

It is the repetition made by the speaker to repair, prevent, or clearance the information uttered by themselves. Besides, the repetition that voluntarily made by the teacher attempt to allow the students to get obtain more opportunities to process the information given (Suherdi, 2009). The utilization of self-repetitions in modifying the interaction in both levels were less compared to the other strategies. To consider the function, self-repetition was very useful in maintaining teacher-student interactions in the classroom. The teacher used this strategy to clearance, emphasize, and retain the information intended. The teacher was highly suggested to repeat their utterances.

Firstly, there were no specific differences between the way of teachers using self-repetition in both elementary and pre-intermediate levels. Secondly, the occurrence of self-repetition in the class where the teacher taught the same material for the second time was decreased in pre-intermediate. As it can be assumed that the tendency of the teacher to produce the unclear words or difficult expressions was decreased since the experience in previous class became the benchmark for the teacher to make the betterment in the following class. Nevertheless, at the elementary level, the use of self-repetition was very consistent. The teacher used the exact amount of self-repetition in the elementary class. So far, the explanation to such

a case happened not because the teacher repeated purposively repeated the same utterance as the class before since the utterances repeated were the difference.

Several points to be noted in this regard, firstly, there were no specific differences between the way of teachers using self-repetition in both elementary and pre-intermediate levels. In common, the teacher employed this strategy to repair, prevent, or clearance the information uttered. Secondly, the occurrence of self-repetition in the class where the teacher taught the same material for the second time was decreased in pre-intermediate. As it can be assumed that the tendency of the teacher to produce the unclear words or difficult expressions was decreased since the experience in previous class became the benchmark for the teacher to make the betterment in the following class.

Nevertheless, at the elementary level, the use of self-repetition was very consistent. The teacher used the exact amount of self-repetition in the elementary class. So far, the explanation to such a case happened not because the teacher repeated purposively repeated the same utterance as the class before since the utterances repeated were the difference. Probably the number of occurrences just by any chance resembled the previous class. Thus, it can be concluded that the utilization of self-repetition does affect not only the level of proficiency but also the material delivery and teacher perception regarding the needs of repeating their utterances for more comprehensive input. Making a lot of self-repetition could support the teacher to prevent and reinforce the information delivered. Moreover, this process also helps students in encouraging them to respond quickly due to the clarity of instruction given.

G. Language Learning Opportunities Identified

Interactional modification plays a very significant role as they provide wider opportunities for classroom interaction and student participation in the learning process. Several studies also support the statement that modified interaction truly promoted acquisition. (Long, as cited in Bahrani, 2012; Ellis, 1997; Gass, 1991, 1997) agree that interactional modification provides the opportunity to negotiate the solution for breakdown communication and facilitate the comprehension of interlanguage input. Specifically, the explanation of how interactional modifications contribute to language learning is explained below. All the data was obtained through the classrooms observed in the research.

H. Repetition of Self Utterances

In the present study, it was found mostly the teacher applied the modification to interactions due to several breakdowns of communications occurred on a particular occasion. In this regard, the gaps noticing by the teacher were mostly followed by the correction. According to Suherdi (2013), the correction occurred in two places: in knowledge-oriented exchange and skill-oriented exchange. Here, the correction occurred when some mistake is existed in performing language skill tasks.

One example of this moment can be seen in Excerpt 1. Excerpt 1 was taken from the second observed session of the elementary class at the beginning of classroom. While the teacher opened the classroom, S4 came late and that was his first time coming to the classroom. After greeting, he made sure that

he was coming to the right class by confirming to the teacher by asking question "/elementary/ yah?" However, the teacher noticed the mispronounced word done by S4, therefore he tried to correct the mistake by pronouncing again the word "elementary" correctly. Fortunately, S4 realized the gap noticing through teacher repetition. Thus, he directly redressed the word "elementary" correctly. The almost same phenomenon occurred to the student in pre-intermediate level.

Excerpt 1. Elementary level (see appendix 3)

S4	*assalamualaikum*
T	*Waalaikumsalam. Please*
S4	*/elementari/ yah*?
S5	*Yes*
T	*Eh elementary yes.*
S4	*Elementary yah.*

As it can be noticed above, the interactional modification does contribute to the language acquisition through noticing the gap made by the speaker. According to Schmidt (2010), bringing gap into awareness is more contributive to the learning process rather than solely stand for implicit learning. This can be the indicator of acquisition take place. Here, the learners need to consider the input that they understand along with the output they produce with the right form of target language so they could obtain the mistaken part to be corrected.

I. Negotiation of meaning

Negotiation meaning is also one of the ways on how learners have language acquisition through modified interaction. It is the process by which two or more interlocutors identify and then attempt to resolve a communication breakdown (Cook, 2015). This is one of the efforts to make understanding in the communication by modifying the utterance. The following excerpt presents the example of how meaning negotiation is happening in the classroom:

Excerpt 2. Elementary level

S4	*Botak botak?*
T	*Botak bold, bold.*
S4	*Is he bold?*
T	*Is he bold? Yes, he is bold. Tadit apa? He is not tall, he is not young, he is not fat, he is bold. Yang manacoba?*

It can be seen in Excerpt 2, the teacher was helping the student to figure out the Indonesian word "botak" in English for s4 to be able to make a question for playing a guessing game. And to keep student`s participation in the conversation, the teacher said: "Botak bold, bold". Therefore, the student finally could make the correct question "is he bold? Thus, the meaning negotiation was made immediately through direct response

IV. CONCLUSION

The result that can be concluded from this study were first, the tendency of the teacher who taught the lower class to modify the interaction is higher due to the less capable of the student to comprehend the information. Secondly, the high occurrence of teacher repeated student`s utterances. This device is considered to be efficient in providing a very significant contribution to help the student comprehend the interaction thus being able to participate in it. Because usually another repetition is used for clarifying, confirming, or emphasizing the important issue. The low occurrence of decompositions. Thirdly, the findings also confirmed that the occurrences of interactional modification

were determined by several factors, such as the level of, material delivery and the amount of teacher talk, and most importantly the experience of the teacher. Fourthly, the findings revealed two language learning opportunities through modifying the interactions, they were gap noticing which increased learner language awareness and meaning negotiation.

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