

# Conversation Gambits in Classroom Speaking Activities

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## ABSTRACT

Gambits are used as signals to start or to open, to continue, and to end the conversation. This paper is aimed at finding out the types and functions of conversation gambits in classroom speaking activities. Using a descriptive method, the research was conducted at the second-year students of office administration and marketing major in one vocational school. The research involved 38 students from two classes of office administration and marketing and the teacher as respondents. The data was gained from observation, questionnaires, and interviews. The observation was done two times, the close-ended interview was also done with the teacher and students two times. The interview questions are about words or phrases are used during conversation activities. The research found that the students used opening gambits, linking gambits, and responding gambits in conversation activity. The gambits function as asking for the information, interrupting, offering the suggestion, personal opinion, giving a reason, hesitation phrase, argument, and counter-argument, seeing the good side, showing interest, repetition, and accepting the compliment.

**Keywords:** Conversation gambits, linking gambits, opening gambits, responding gambits, speaking

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the language skills that need to be mastered by students, it is also called spoken language. "Speaking is so much daily life that we take it for granted" (Thornbury, 2005, p. 1). It means that speaking is a part of daily life, the person produces many words a day in communication with others in any situation. So, the person always faces the situation to speak or to produce the words and it can take place spontaneously.

Moreover, "that effective oral communication requires the ability to use the language appropriately in social interaction" (Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 204). It means that speaking is the process of transferring and receiving real information between the speaker and the listener. So, when people have good communication, they will be good at their relationship.

In addition, "speaking is an event which occurs when we communicate verbally" (Tatham & Morton, 2011, p. 6). It means that speaking is the event while using the vocal track to make appropriate sounds for communicating between the speaker and listener. To make communication work, the speech is used to be understood by both the speaker and the listener, because in communication the speaker also could be the listener,

and also the listener also could be the speaker. On the other hand, Fulcher (2014) says that "speaking is a verbal language to communicate with others" (p. 23). It means that people wish to communicate with others in all situations. They wish to communicate with the others are so large, it could be with people or many people.

In classroom speaking activities, there are many activities such as discussion, presentation, and conversation. One of the activities in classroom speaking activities is the conversation. The conversation has been of primary interest to language researchers; since natural, unplanned, every day. "Conversation is the most commonly occurring and universal language "genre", in that conversation is a speech activity in which all which all members of a community routinely participate" (Riggenbach, 1999, p. 55).

During the conversation in speaking class, students always struggle to express their opinions, emphasize a point, and keep the conversation going. In addition, students have to start, continue and end the conversation in all situations. They always use the words or phrases to make the conversation going, the words or phrases used by students in that situation are gambits. "Gambit is words or phrases which help us express what we are trying to say. Gambit can be used to introduce an opinion,

to respond to others' opinion and to link a topic what we have to say to what someone has just said, to agree or disagree, to respond to what we have heard" (Keller, 2002, p.4). In introducing an opinion, a speaker can use gambits "in my opinion....." While in responding to others' opinions, the speaker can say "I don't think that...." or "to be realistic....". These gambits are mostly in multiple word units. However, there are some gambits which certain of a single word such as "First", "second", and "generally". These gambits refer to the gambits which ease us to communicate smoothly with others in day-to-day communication. In this study, this gambit is called conversation since it is used in conversation speech in a form of a speaking class of conversation activity.

On the other hand, Danesi and Rocci (2009) state that a gambit strategic function, that is, they allow speakers to open a conversation, to keep it going, to make it smooth, to repair any normally within it. It means that the gambit is used in the conversation and it has many functions such as initiating, taking the turn, entering the conversation, and also as the signals to speakers that they are paying attention to what is being said and it also can repair the breakdown of conversation.

Moreover, "gambits are words or phrases used to open a conversation, to keep it going, to repair any anomaly within it, and thus to maximize its economy" (Coulmas, 2011, p. 96). It means that gambits are designed to keep a conversation going from the beginning of the conversation until the end of the conversation. Gambits are words or phrases that are used in conversations, it is used by students as a signal. It is always available used in all situations on being the conversation from starting until ending the conversation.

Generally, gambits serve to introduce what the speaker is about to say. When introducing an opinion, he might for instance use gambits. Most of the gambits are used by students in communication, especially in conversation. It is always used by students, because in conversation activities the students have to be able to express their opinions for starting a conversation, taking a turn, or entering a conversation. Gambits may be used by students to signal a wish to take a turn, to get their friends to answer, or to express a wish to end the conversation. The writer expects that the students' use of gambits can help them how to start, continue, and end the conversation in every situation. Based on the explanation above, the writer wants to conduct a research entitled "Conversation gambits in classroom speaking activities".

## 2. METHOD

In conducting this research, the descriptive qualitative method is used. Qualitative research can also be described as an effective model that occurs in a natural

setting that enables the researcher to develop a level of detail from being highly involved in the actual experiences (Creswell, 2003). It means that descriptive research is done by observing and seeing reality. The research was conducted at one vocational school in Bogor. The teacher and the second-year students of office administration and marketing major are chosen as participants. The purposive sampling technique was used by the writer in this research. So, the data were collected from observation, questionnaire, and interview are the observation sheet, voice recorder, and checklist notes.

### 2.1. Research Instrument

#### 2.1.1. Observation

The structured observations were used to find out the types and functions of gambits used by the students in doing conversation activities. In doing observation the researcher becomes the observer to know every activity in the classroom by taking some checklist notes and recording the activity. Therefore, the recorder is used to record the students in doing conversation to know the types and functions of gambits are used by students from opening, continuing, and also ending the conversation.

#### 2.1.2. Questionnaire

Open-ended questionnaires were distributed to gain information on the types and functions of gambits used by students in conversation activities. In this instrument, some questions were given to the students to get more information. The questions are consist of 15 questions, the questions were given in other to get more information about the type of gambits and gambits functions used by students in conversation activities. There were three indicators in the questionnaire including opening gambit, linking gambit, and responding gambit.

#### 2.1.3. The interview

The interview was used as the last instrument. The kind of interview that was used by the writer is a structured interview because he asked the questions that have been listed before based on the indicators from the theory. Those questions are about the types and functions of gambits are used by the students in conversation activities. Moreover, the interview was done to get more information that can support the previous instrument.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After gaining and describing the data from the observation, questionnaire, and interview, the writer analyzed the data to find out the types and the functions of conversation gambits used by students in classroom speaking activities. Based on the result of the instruments, it can be seen that conversation gambits are

used by students in classroom speaking activities, such as opening gambits, linking gambits, and responding gambits. "Gambit is a word, phrase, or construction of some type used to open conversation, to keep it going, to make it flow smoothly, to gain attention, to seek approval, etc" (Danesi, 2003, p. 75). Here is detailed information on the types of gambits and each function used by students in classroom speaking activities.

### 3.1. Opening Gambits

This type of gambit is used to help the speaker to start the conversation or to introduce the ideas during the conversation. Referring to the data of observation showed that opening gambits used by students to open the conversation or also to introduce the ideas. While the student making conversation there are words and phrases were uttered such as "How are you? Where do you go on holiday? Hey, I have an idea, why we don't go on holiday together at the end of the holiday semester?" From these words or phrases, it was found the gambits functions such as asking for information, offering a suggestion. The phrases *How are you? Where do you go on holiday?* are the gambits function that students used in the conversation for asking the information. So, the phrase *Hey, I have an idea* are the gambit function that student used in the conversation for offering a suggestion. So, the question "Why we don't go on holiday together at the end of the holiday semester? This question is offering a suggestion.

Moreover, the result of the questionnaire show that the students used opening gambits during conversation such as asking for information 30%, offering suggestion 42%, and personal opinion 28%. In addition, refer too result of interview showed that the students and teacher said that students uttered some kind of gambit and used it in each functions. In the interview there are five questions are given to students and teacher. The questions are about what words or phrases used by student in doing conversation. The teacher said that the student to start the conversation they usually use "How are you, what is your name" in order to give the greeting to their friends.

Teacher said that "*kalau biasanya untuk memulai percakapan itu mereka menggunakan kata seperti how are you, what is your name, seperti itu aja sii lebih kepada greeting*". On the other hand, the participants 2 said that "*Paling greeting2 biasa aja kaya Hii, goodmorning, good afternoon, hello*". Actually, students uttered each greeting, such as *Hii, good morning, good afternoon, hello* to open the conversation. It shows that the students used opening gambits in other to ask the information, interrupting, offering suggestion and personal opinion. It supported to Keller (2002) opening gambits are use not only to start a conversation, but also to introduce the ideas during a conversation. It means that this type of gambits was to lead into something what we have on our mind in conversation.

### 3.2. Linking Gambits

This type of gambits used by students to link an idea or to keep the conversation. Referring to the data of observation each gambits functions found such as hesitation phrase, argument and counter argument and seeing the good side. While the student making conversation there are words and phrases were uttered such as "Hmm, very very nice, I had it but I return it, well, I think smartphone is cool, but I don't really like it". The phrase *Hmm, very very nice* is this gambit function is to make hesitation. *I had it but I return it* is argument and counter argument, *I think smartphone is cool, but I don't really like it* the phrase was seeing the good side.

Meanwhile, the result of questionnaire show that the students used linking gambits during conversation. The function of gambits that used by students are argument and counter argument 8%, seeing the good side 26%, and illustration the point 66%. In addition, refer to the result of interview showed that the students and teacher said that the students uttered some phrase in conversation.

Teacher said that "*kalau ditanya mengapa ya, untuk memberikan ilustrasi atau contoh umumnya menggunakan kata ini, tadi menurut and ada for instance tp umumnya menggunakan for example*". To give a example or illustrating point students generally use the word *for example* in their conversation. On the other hand, as stated by Participant 1 said "*biasanya menggunakan for example karena kalau for instance jarang-jarang*". To give an example, they generally use *for example* because *for instance* is not familiar. It showed that the students used linking gambits in other to give reason, thinking ahead, hesitation phrase, argument and counter argument, and seeing the good side.

### 3.3. Responding Gambits

This type of gambits is used to give the respond to each other. Referring to the result of observation, gambits functions were found, such as showing interest, being sympathetic, and accepting the compliment. While the student making conversation there are words and phrases were uttered such as "Really? Waaww, It's very sad, Yes, thank you very much". The word *Really?* is one the gambit function that student used in the conversation in showing interest. The phrase *Waaww, It's very sad* is one of the functions of gambits that student used in the conversation to show the sympathetic.

On the other hand, in the questionnaire, that responding gambits used by students it showed that there were three gambit functions used such as being sympathetic 2%, accepting the compliment 34%, and repetition 64%.

After gaining data from questionnaire, the writer interviewed the teacher and students in other to find out more information responding gambits in classroom

speaking activities. He asked 15 questions to the teacher and students then they answered all the questions. Based on the result of interview, most of the students use types of conversation gambits and each functions of gambits in classroom speaking activities are used. The teacher said “*More to thank you, yes, generally for classmates in SMK, they rarely say I really appreciate it. Then Rarely do they say don't mention it. But actually I have given examples I really appreciate it*”. It shows that the students prepare to choose thank you when given the appreciation. On the other hand, the student said “*biasanya tuh Right? ada yang satu lagi really?*” actually she used “*Right?*” And other one is “*Really?*”. In showing the interest, “*right?*” and “*Really?*” are uttered by the students in showing the interest.

According to the result of analysis, the writer concludes that in classroom speaking activities the conversation gambits are used from the beginning until the end of the conversation. As Keller (2002) state that there are three types of gambits in conversation. They are opening gambits, linking gambits, and responding gambits. In addition, the gambits functions also found in classroom speaking activities. The students used gambits in different functions such as, asking for information, interrupting, offering suggestion, personal opinion, give a reason, thinking ahead, illustrating point, hesitation phrase, argument and counter argument, seeing the good side, showing interest, repetition, being sympathetic and accepting the compliment.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The research founds that the conversation gambits found in classroom speaking activities, such as opening gambits, linking gambits, and responding gambits. Therefore, each type of gambits uttered by the students in classroom speaking activities such as asking for information, interrupting, offering suggestion, personal opinion. The second gambits is linking gambits, it were uttered by students in classroom speaking activities, the functions found in this research are give a reason, thinking ahead, illustrating point, hesitation phrase, argument and counter argument, seeing the good side. Therefore, the next type of gambits is responding gambits, the functions found in this research showing interest, repetition, being sympathetic and accepting the compliment.

Based on the result of research, the writer given suggestion for the teachers, student, and the next writer. The suggestion are. First, the writer suggest that should provide the examples of conversation gambit in conversation activities. Second, the student suggested to use conversation gambits during conversation in order to help them to start conversation, to keep the conversation going, and also to end the conversation. Third, the next writer suggested that in conducting the research of conversation gambits they may conduct the research in the relevant institution, and by different method research.

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