

“Tell Me How”: Supervisor’s Trigger Questions and Student’s Self-reflection to Examine International Master Student Difficulties during Dissertation Supervision

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ABSTRACT

This paper shows that a “shared knowledge” is an important aspect for supervisor-international student’s relation for master level. Indeed, Conversation Analysis method is not designed to understand physiological issues on international students’ problems and pressure, but the Conversation Analysis excerpts show that when student is showing the symptoms of being stressed out over academic matter through non-verbal gesture or voice intonation, it is essential for the supervisor to put on take-your-time strategy by asking ‘tell me how’ for the student to manage on what they want to say.

Keywords: Conversation Analysis, International Students, Cross Cultural Communication

1. INTRODUCTION

A cross-linguistic interaction presents challenges to international students in comprehending academic modules with the central problems such as time pressure, lacking on critical analysis, language difficulties and additional of students’ personal problems (Brown, 2007). Brown adds that adjustment in some academic aspects has not always successful, and supervisors often have to deal with many problems that are specific to International students.

There has not been a lot of research on dissertation supervision of postgraduate international students. Ward (2001) is writing an academic cultural dissonance on the area where there is a little attention given of the impact of the recruitment of international students. And Brown has been drawing a paper in examining the dissertation supervision of international master students based on his own wide-ranging experiences in supervising international students in the UK.

Hofstede (1991) mentions that Southeast Asian students in particular are not comfortable with critical exchange and used to be told on what to understand. As in the UK, Skelton and Richards (1991) claim that students are rewarded for the ability of critical thinking, opinion and the implementation of the modules to new problems.

Hence, this paper is trying to present a practical approach through a 28 minutes video-recording (see appendix 9) as an evidence of the interaction failure or success from the conversation and is examined by a conversation analysis method to verifying international student understanding in doing dissertation during supervision through Indonesian student’s dissertation consultation. The discussion is focusing on the base of CA such as turn-taking, repair, communication break-down which I am trying to lead to the implementation of CA in Cross-cultural Communication between a native UK lecturer and an international student.

Results are drawn in the conclusion that it takes trigger questions from the supervisor and student's self-reflection as a way of student showing the understanding of supervisor instruction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW OR RESEARCH BACKGROUND

According to Gallagher (2007) trigger questions are part of the process to analyze current situation when it comes to lecturer and student relationship. Trigger questions used as a tool to test student's understanding of current situation which then leads to lecturer observation and reflection. He argues that the process is the highlight part to examine the problem as in real life, often people fail to see the real issue and therefore, they put time and effort to solving the wrong matters.

He adds that experiential learning such as observation and reflection; formulation of abstract concepts; and testing implications can help lecturer in encouraging students' reflection and improve their ability in conceptualization and generating ideas. Once the lecturer begins to understand the issue that is faced by the students, they will start to ask questions to foster students' deep learning to create solution to their own problems. Lectures will also trigger the students to acknowledge the kind of process they are in by asking following questions; where are we now? Where are we going? How do we get there?

The objective of the questions is to gather relevant information to let the students examine the most meaningful and productive terms of their problems. These questions aim to stimulate the student to understand their experiential baggage as at the same time is giving them space to start the deep learning process of analysis and evaluation to help them create a decision-making.

Gallagher (2007) claims that the trigger questions should be free from anything that generates difficulties in understanding and prevent the students from having expected outcomes of reflection. He adds as well that the lecturer should know the students so that the setting of trigger

questions is not to retrieve students' mistakes but to help the find the solution.

There is another way of creating relevant experiential learning for lecturers to their students as there has been some studies on self-reflection to help people in increasing awareness of intercultural context to adapt to different culture situation (Howard, 2003; Das & Anand, 2012; Liddicoat & McConachy, 2016). As for teachers, critical teacher reflection is important to create culturally relevant pedagogy as part of a process to measure teachers' levels of care and concern about their students, which can give positive impact to students' academic success and emotional well-being. The purpose of critical reflection should not be to directing teachers for what they believe and how to make things work in teacher-student relationship. It is a process of improving practice and becoming effective teacher for today's dynamic student demographic (Howard, 2003).

Das and Anand (2012) have made a study on examining critical reflection as a strategy for international university students to develop their knowledge of international social work and cultural competency. Real-life example are used to draw students' process in doing critical reflective by being interviewed and the students have to make a presentation about their ability to cope in unfamiliar situation when they are abroad. However, the study is only focusing on the UK and Indian students as the research's sample. The research result shows that international environment cultivate strong power in enabling critical reflection especially for teaching and learning approaches, the concept of critical reflection remain effective.

Abram et al. (2005) adds that reflection can cultivate a transformative learning which is not usually being taught during the modules in the class. O'Sullivan (2003) defines transformative learning as a learning that involves deep and structural shift of basic way of thinking, feeling and action. The shift involves people understanding of themselves and their relationships with other human beings. As such, it requires a student-teacher relationship that open the channels as learning partners.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this discussion section, I am dividing the sub-sections into four; the first one is talking about the conversation where student is expressing her intensity towards the academic issue. The second one is describing about the conversation where the supervisor is giving trigger questions as part of supervision process. The third is drawing upon student's reflection on how she has been doing in the study and the last one is about the language barrier that is often become the main reason of international student's difficulties.

Thus, in this discussion, instead of telling what and how to do, the excerpts of the video recording show the strategies of the supervisor in handling student's pressure towards the study and checking on the student's understanding on the dissertation she is working on. The strategies on how the supervisor manage the interaction will now be drawn using appropriate excerpts from the data of video recording.

a. Calming down student's intense nerves

In the excerpt 1, Ana as the supervisor opens up the conversation with non-academic related talks (see appendix 1). However, as soon as the conversation goes to line 21 to 26, the conversation tone slightly changes as follow:

Excerpt 1 (transcript simplified)

- 21 ANN : okay brilliant \$it's so good to see you\$
- 22 YUN : thank you↓
- 23 (0.9)
- 24 ANN : a::nd (0.6) >you did it<
- 25 you [got ay de yu ((EDU)) eight zero three three in
- 26 YUN : [oh my God↓

Yuyun shows a different way of people having conversation, where instead of saying "It's good to see you too", she goes with only "thank you" and lower intonation

of voice. The pause in line 23 and the buffer in line 24 might indicate that Anna knows something is not right in the conversation. In addition, the video (see appendix 1) also shows that Yuyun tends to cross her hands as a gesture of feeling intense with the module she is talking about with the supervisor. The conversation continues as Anna gives congratulate her for finishing one of her modules, but Yuyun replies with the same lower tone voice saying "oh my God". The conversation continues until line 54 as the breakdown tone voice happens again.

Excerpt 1 (transcript simplified)

- 54 YUN : ((sigh)) so hopefully↓
(0.9) hopefully↓
- 55 >oh my God, oh my God<
- 56 ANN : it'll be alright it'll be alright
- 57 YUN : last week I should like-
- 58 ANN : you should've come to see me↑ ((tapping a hand down to table twice))

In the excerpt 1 line 58, Anna's non-verbal hand gesture of tapping the table indicates a shared knowledge between both of them. As the gesture could possibly mean that Anna gets angry by tapping a hand down in the table with the voice tone being emphasized. But with a "shared knowledge" exist between communicant and communicator, the communicant knows what is the meaning of particular gestures or meanings within the talks [3]. So instead of Yuyun being uncomfortable with the situation, she is responding calmly saying that Anna was on a leave (see appendix 1). A "shared knowledge" then can be one of the aspects to help teacher-student having a better consultation, which is not yet being discussed specifically in a literature of teacher-student relationship.

Furthermore, the whole conversation of the video recording that is transcribed, Ana seems to carry quite some shooting words to Yuyun. In the excerpt 2 (see appendix 2) line 9 to 14 is drawing on how Ana tries to put down a ground expectation towards what is happening and how she expects for Yuyun to digest the

situation that is happening. The way Anna puts down the situation in line 12 to 14 is more of looking into the future implementation instead of talking about the grades or the feedback that might not be good. In response, excerpt 1 and 2 tend to show a constant pattern where Yuyun tends to reply with a lower intonation

Excerpt 2 (transcript simplified)

9 ANN : and we'll get feedback to you as quick as we
 10 possibly can [yeah
 11 YUN : [°yeah
 yeah°↓
 12 ANN : and remember (.) that eight ow three three was
 13 that living experience so that you can write a
 14 brilliant [dissertation (.)
 yeah
 15 YUN : °yes yes°↓

Another breakdown voice tone happens in the excerpt 4 (see appendix 4) line 17 to 28 where Anna tries to give another words to calm her down, but instead, Yuyun is using negative response to it. The marked silence in the line 19 already indicate as an outright disagreement, which about to lead to a negative statement [5]. Thus as expected, line 22 to 28, Yuyun explains her disagreement for being hard on herself.

An interesting sequence seem to happen in the conversation where Anna sort of implement *take-your-time* strategy where according to [2] describe that *take-your-time* interaction can be used if in an ongoing conversation there is an “*oh gosh*” sort of particles, tremulous voice, and delayed words. However, in the line 21, Anna repeats her words as a gesture of making sure that Yuyun gets the message right that she is being just a little bit hard on herself, not telling that she should not be hard on herself.

Moreover, the line 24, where there is a long pause, Anna does not just take it as a chance for her turn of conversation, but waiting for Yuyun to finish her sentences. It is also glossed as ‘she obviously has some explanation to do’ [5]

Excerpt 4 (transcript simplified)

17 ANN : yeah↑ (.) I think you're being little bit hard on
 18 yourself
 19 (1.6)
 20 YUN : ouh↓(hhhh)
 21 ANN : a little [bit [a little bit
 22 YUN : >[I had to [I had to<
 23 I mean em- em- em-
 24 (1.2)
 25 my writing is not-
 26 Ay- ay- ay- when I looked back my writing I know
 27 that my writing is not at the level of writing
 28 dissertation but I'm trying to

b. Supervisor's trigger questions

Penn and Watermeyer (2008) conduct a cross-cultural patient-pharmacist interaction research on examining patients' comprehension in using the drugs instructions. Addressing the question how pharmacists' are managing strategies to make sure that the patients are consuming the drugs exactly in the right way. The same situation happens during Anna and Yuyun's dissertation consultation where couple of times, instead of telling Yuyun what to do, she is more often asking how Yuyun understands particular terms. In the excerpt 2 (see appendix 2) line 16 to 27 is where Anna first ask a question related to Yuyun's dissertation.

After the question, followed a long pause and seems to be uncertainty as Yuyun utters “*um*” in between her sentences. The long pause can indicate that she is not sure on how to answer the addressed question, but it is also interesting how in the line 20, Yuyun puts confirmation statement which decrease the possibility of Anna's question becoming a trouble source. The low intonation in the

line 22 and 27 can possibly show that Anna knows that Yuyun has not yet understand the question, since the question given is to trigger the understanding of Yuyun towards what she should do. In contrast to excerpt 3 line 4 and line 11, there is slightly change in the intonation as the conversation shows that Yuyun draws her understanding towards what she has to do better than in the excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2 (transcript simplified)

16 ANN : **So what kinds of things**
(.) do you know now that
17 you'll do differently in
writing your
18 dissertation?
19 (2.0)
20 YUN : u::m in terms my
approach of u:m literature
21 review
22 ANN : yeah↓
23 YUN : Of course it a big piece
24 it's something that (0.9)
takes most of the time
25 I would say because I
keep changing my journals
26 (0.7)
27 ANN : right↓

Excerpt 3 (transcript simplified)

1 YUN : but the one that you gave
us like the (.)
2 the writing literature
3 (0.5)
4 ANN : yeah↑
5 YUN : from the university I
[think RMIT or something
6 (0.3)
7 rea::ily help
8 ANN :
[yeah (.) yeah (.) yeah
9 **do they good?**
10 YUN : yeah

11 ANN : **ho:w**↑
12 (0.4)
13 YUN : e::m (0.3) in terms of the
(.) the systematic
14 (0.5)

In addition to the excerpt 3 (see appendix 3), Anna addresses her second request for Yuyun to explain her understanding towards the things she has learn. There is a pattern appears here, that after Anna is addressing the trigger questions, there are always pauses before Yuyun is responding. Antaki [5] claims that in the rhetorical principle the marked silence is usually organised to build up an argumentation.

The following excerpt 5 is the last trigger question asked by Anna which can indicate that Anna has perceived Yuyun's level of understanding. There is no gap in answering Anna's question comparing to the excerpts 2 and 3 previously. Penn and Watermayer (2008) claim that within the interactional organisation, once the demonstration of understanding has been achieved, it is not necessary to address further clarification. Thus, that is possibly what happens, as Anna thought she already understands Yuyun's current level of comprehension in what she is doing.

Excerpt 5 (transcript simplified)

1 ANN : has this- has eight two
three three (0.6)
2 helped you to work out
how much of ingredients
3 you're gonna need. **Tell
me how**↑
4 YUN : because um from eight
one seven two (.)
5 I got all of the literature
6 I↑ actually open eight
one seven two again
7 ANN : good↓

In essence, those excerpts 2, 3 and 5 show that Anna use direct question such as "do they good? How?" "tell me how" and "what will you do differently" to measure

Yuyun's understanding. Although it makes Yuyun to stop in some pauses in the beginning, Yuyun manages to make a confirmation statement to the questions she is addressed as a way to decrease miscommunication during the supervision. According to Penn and Watermayer (2008) using direct question will enable the other person to demonstrate their understanding through the answers quickly and easily. However, it is important to give the student space to grasp the question or even to ask back if student's understanding toward the question is correct.

c. Student's reflection

As in analysing conversation using Conversation Analysis method, none should focus on the why instead of how the organisation of turn-taking, sequencing, repair and so on (ten Have, 2002). Thus, in this part, I will not focus on what kind of reflection is made but more of how the pattern is happening in the conversation between Anna and Yuyun. Hence, according to the data below, this can be said that the trigger questions lead to student's reflection as the trigger questions are happening in the excerpt 2, 3 and 5 from line 1 to 7. The following is the continuity of excerpt 5 from line 13 to 22 that makes Yuyun realise what she did and what she did not do. There is also slightly changes in terms of the mood in conversation, where in the excerpt 1, 2 and 4, Yuyun is showing a low intonation in responding Anna's shooting words. In these excerpts 5 and 7, there is confidence in the voice tone even though Yuyun is describing the things she had not done the right way in the past.

Excerpt 5 (transcript simplified)

13 YUN : >well anyway↑<
 14 ANN : >validity<
 15 (0.3)
 16 YUN : yeah validity↓ I had to::
 (.) I had to try it on first
 17 or something so that I
 know it
 18 >I didn't↑<
 19 I wrote it down I didn't
 do this

20 So that's why↑ >I didn't
 know it didn't work<
 21 Ay- I shou↑ld've done it
 before
 22 tested to some people
 23 What do you think of the
 question

Excerpt 7 (transcript simplified)

1 YUN : >but then again<, you
 know what↑ (0.7) if I hadn't gone
 2 through the hard bit
 3 (0.9)
 4 the all of the wrong turns
 5 (1.7)
 6 [I would-I would[n't
understand (.) ex↑[actly what it is
 7 ANN : [°you wouldn't [you
 wouldn't° [exact↑ly
 8 YUN : I don't understand what
 it means
 9 about being researcher↑
 10 ANN : exact↑ly

The overlaps in the line 6 and 7 reflect that there is another shared knowledge between them as [4] claims that speakers show a "shared knowledge" when the speakers are completing each other utterance which shows that the speakers know what is inside each other head as line 7, eventually Anna says "exactly" before even finishing the sentences. Another long pause in the line 5 indicates that Yuyun is trying to build up a statement which again, makes *take-your-time* strategy becomes more relevant as Anna does not try to take the turn. Although overlap happens in the line 6 and 7, but it is more of a completing each other sentences instead of an overlap that breakdown the communication process.

d. Language barrier

As Gallagher (2007) claims in the literature review that one of the difficulties that he finds during international student supervision is the language barrier. The

following excerpts are drawing some repairs made by Yuyun in explaining her understanding. There is also one in the excerpt 2 line 20 that I have discussed earlier, when Yuyun seems to not really understand the question and instead of just answer with however she understood it, she makes a statement to see if her understanding is correct.

Excerpt 6 (transcript simplified)

14 YUN : but then again it's not
 15 it's more experimental
 it's like
 16 ANN : it was experiential
 17 YUN : experiential

A simple way to avoid misunderstanding across language barriers is to discuss and eliminate the potential confusion (Penn and Watermayer, 2008). They also add that to identify misunderstanding, repeated verification questions can be addressed.

Excerpt 8

ANN : back page
 YUN : yea (.)°there's a check[list°
 ANN :
 [there's a check-
 (.)
exactly
 So these kinds- these are
 the things that
 (.)
 I'm supposed to
 So when I get you the
 ethics form
 I'll give you feedback and
 I'll approve it
 and I'll give you guide to
 your methodology and if
 you need help with any
 literature review I'll help
 you try find things yea

when you got your data
 collected I'll help you
 going through that give
 you some suggestion
 here's
 what you can do
 goals in terms of progress
 that's kind of pretty much
 there those dates
 provide challenges to
 make you think
 YUNN : did you write it hahahaha
 ANN : \$if only\$

Excerpt 8 is being transcribed almost at the end of the supervision. Earlier in the excerpt 2 when Anna is addressing a short expectation towards her assignment, Yuyun reaction is always with the low voice intonation. In contrast to this excerpt 8, she makes a joke out of the expectation checklists instead of responding to it with another low intonation.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper shows that a “shared knowledge” is an important aspect for supervisor-international student’s relation for master level. Indeed Conversation Analysis method is not designed to understand physiological issues on international students’ problems and pressure, but the excerpts show that when student is showing the symptoms of being stressed out over academic matter through non-verbal gesture or voice intonation, it is essential for the supervisor to put on *take-your-time* strategy for the student to manage on what they want to say.

As according to Hofstede (1991) most Southeast Asia students are not comfortable to do critical exchange or to disagree with their lecturers. I would say that based on the excerpts, there is a tendency in lacking confidence of her own ability, which possibly leads Southeast Asian student not comfortable to engage in critical thinking. This can be one specific aspect to look at to in the further study.

However, this paper is examining only one meeting of supervision with a student coming only from Indonesia. Future study can multiply the amount of meeting recorded and the nationalities of the students as well as focusing on the pattern of students' reflection as according to [3] there is a huge possibilities in developing conversation analysis method with a direct approach to people's cognitive and emotion. Thus, an interview with the supervisor can also be examined as part of verification in how teachers' aim to do the supervision to the international students.

BIODATA

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