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English Learning Difficulties for Multilingual Student:

A Case Study of an Indonesian Student in Learning English

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to help the learner as a multilingual student in improving her English by understanding a particular learner's strength and weaknesses in speaking and writing. Single case study is used as a method. Steps in conducting this research are initial interview, analysis of spoken data, and also analysis of written data. The results of the interview, spoken and written data being discussed in detail using previous research and theories as literature research. Results of the research showed that some mistakes in her writing and speaking are influenced by her L1 or in this case Bahasa Indonesia.

Keywords: single case study; speaking; writing; multilingual

Introduction

In this globalization era, learning more than one language is becoming a necessity for every person. According to Marian and Shook (2012), in 2006, the European Commission conducted a survey related to language used by the world's population. The result of this research proved that 56 percent of respondents were bilingual or multilingual. Some discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of being bilingual or multilingual learners also appeared.

This case study will focus on an English learner that is still communicating actively using her mother tongue. An interview is conducted to gain information about cultural and language learning background, learning difficulties, and learning strategies. This research also aims at achieving deep understanding on the effect of active communication in another language in influencing English learning.

Methods

Data of research derive from an Indonesia student in university level who is still learning English. Detail of the student stated as follow:

NO	QUESTIONS	ANSWERS
1	GENDER	Female
2	AGE	21
3	OCCUPATION	University student
4	START LEARNING ENGLISH	Sixth grade of Elementary school (12 years old)
5	L1	Indonesia
6	L2	English
7	L3	French

This research is using single case study design based on some reasons. Stake (1995) stated that more than one case can be simultaneously studied. However, each case study should be concentrated, single inquiry, studied holistically in its own entirety. Hyett et al. (2014) add that case study should be designed to suit the case and research questions. According to Siggelkow (2007) single case studies do provide extremely convincing data to the theories.

In order to help the learner in improving her English, initial interview is conducted. It is important to help the researcher understand the English learning background of the learner. Questions of the interview are:

1. What is your L1?
2. What is your L2?
3. What is your L3?
4. When did you start to learn English?
5. Are you still learning English now?
6. In what ways do you learn English now?
7. What are your difficulties in learning English?
8. What strategies do you use to deal with the difficulties?

Both written and spoken data are collected and analysed to understand the competency level of learner. Since she is an English debater, the argumentative paragraph will be taken as the writing data and debate speech will be taken as the spoken data. This is selected since according to Anderson, Hamilton, and Hattie (2004) students will give their best results when they are in the environment that is congruent with their academic and social needs. Findings of case study then being analysed using some previous studies and literature. At the end of the essay, several recommendations on learning strategies and key areas that might be improved by the students will be given.

Results and Discussion

In this discussion part, analysis of learner's spoken and written data will be analysed. Spoken data was taken from the learner's recording transcription in delivering debate speech. This recording is specifically used for this case study. As well as for the writing analysis, the learner writes an argumentative paragraph under the same topic with spoken data. Both the spoken and written data topic was chosen by the learner.

3.1 Analysis of spoken data

Mazouzi (2013) used three factors in measuring learners' speaking ability. Those are fluency, grammatical accuracy, and control of content. Brumfit in Nation (1989), explained that fluency can be analysed by using speed and flow of language production, the degree of control of language items, and language content interaction. Using these theories to analyse learner's spoken data in this current study, the learner can be categorized as a fluent speaker. She has a fast speed with a good intonation, and it seems that she does not make unnecessary stops and pauses. Her pronunciation is clear and overall her speech is easy to be followed and understood.

Regarding the grammatical accuracy factor, the data indicates that sometimes the learner makes errors. There are several errors made by the learner in relation to the plural form. In line 14, she says "We would like to redefine this into three part of definition.". In this case, she omits

the use of –s as three is a plural noun, and it should be followed by a noun + -s. In line 17, she also makes another error when saying about "And also those remote area that may be stay in the developing," When we refer to the context of the speech, she explains about three different categories of remote areas. It means that she is correct in using 'those' instead of 'this'. However, again she does not put –s as a plural noun to explain that there is more than one area. According to Politzer and Ramirez in Ellis (2008), errors are distinguished into morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. Plural error that the learner makes is categorized into grammatical morpheme in the field of Second Language Acquisition.

This kind of error occurs since Bahasa Indonesia does not have a singular-plural agreement. In Bahasa Indonesia, when we want to say three areas, we will say *tiga daerah* which means that the word area will not get suffix –s, but the number will be given in front of the noun to explain how many areas. It is in line with Beardsmore (1986) who stated that the difficulties of a second language learner in dealing with phonology, vocabulary, and grammar of L2 are due to the interference of habits from L1.

Another error that the learner makes in this study is lexical. Line 18 "developing region, but still there is a lackness of technology, there is a lackness of em facility, and". It shows that learner uses the word "lackness" instead of lack. In fact, there is no word "lackness" in English. It seems that the learner makes an error in suffix choice. According to Ellis (2008), lexical error is a common error in learning language as a second language learner. Kocić (2008) stated that both L1 and L2 learners experience a similar difficulty in lexical forms and usually confuse the suffixes.

The next error that the learner made in her speaking is the use of clauses "how the way". She repeatedly says this clause as in line 3, 24, 29, and 31. However, those four sentences have different explanations about the use of that clause. For examples in line 24. She says, "we think that how the way we would like to help them….". When we look at the sentence, this clause does not have a meaning on its own, and also does not contribute any meaning to the sentence. If we delete the clause it will be "we think that we would like to help them…." and then this sentence has meaning. Similar thing happens in line 29, however a different case happens in line 31. In this line, she says "this is how the way we would like to achieve the idea of equality….". She maintains to talk about how equality will be achieved. In this case, we can keep how and the sentence will be "this is how we would like to achieve."

If we look at her writing, she never uses the clause 'how the way'. The analysis above also shows that the clause "how the way" is a meaningless utterance. However, since she uses it repeatedly, it seems that she uses this clause as a communication strategy. Her ability to use communication strategy in stalling or time gaining is good. However, it also indicates that she lacks lexical knowledge. Based on Haviland (2006), lexical knowledge includes the ability to use figurative word and understand the meaning of the word. It is supported by Bialystok (2001) who stated that bilingual students will learn about how words can build meaning. It is called as lexical or referential arbitrariness.

Even though several errors are found in her speech, she is able to use some communication strategies. Brown (2006) cites Dornyei (1995) pointing out several communication strategies in speaking. One of the strategies is called stalling or time gaining strategy. This strategy is used to fill pauses and gain time to think. She uses fillers during her speech. For instance, in line 6 "There are also the existence(s) of suku laut or even people that they are living and also settle an, um," and line 7 Um, on the sea while they have, they have house, they also have a building on the sea.

She uses fillers 'em' to help her explain about people in *suku laut* (name of a region in Indonesia). Duvall etal. (2014) sums up some arguments related to the impacts of using fillers in speaking English. He explained that to date, scholars are split in their ideas about positive and negative impacts of fillers on speakers' credibility. Most of the scholars believe that when speakers increase their fillers in speaking, they are actually decreasing their credibility. Others believe that filler words positively affect the credibility of speakers. Some others believe that filler words have no correlation with speakers' credibility.

Another strategy being used by her in speaking is self-repetition. As in line 9, she says "the government allocate, the government allocate the program …". She uses this strategy couple of times during her speech. Rabab'ah (2013) explained that L2 speakers tend to need more time to process and plan their speech to create natural and fluent speaking. That is why several strategies are used to help them such as fillers and hesitation devices, to create fluent communication. Further, he also stated that repetition can be a good strategy to manage a communication trouble spot.

Regarding the control of content, it seems that the learner does not have a problem. The learner is able to manage the content and focus on her topic. She also uses structure that is easy to follow.

3.2 Analysis of written data

Similar to speaking, in this written data a lexical error about the word "lackness" was also found in sentence 6. According to Kaweera (2013), this type of error is included in intralingual error. Intralingual error reflects the language user that does generalizations, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under the rules. She tends to think that the word 'lack' is similar to another word that needs suffix '–ness' to create an antonym. Based on the repetition of this error, it seems that the learner does not know that she makes an error. Toyota (2009) suggested that learners may need a form-focused instruction to make them aware of grammatical features and to avoid fossilisation. Fossilisation can be described as an error that becomes a permanent feature of a learner's interlanguage.

Learner uses an informal way to write 'that is'. She uses 'that's' rather than 'that is'. Canagarajah (2013) stated that written language is typically related to the language of book; formal, academic, and planned. It is in order to make sure that it can be processed by varied readership.

The learner also tends to use spoken language in her writing. It is shown by her written result. When it becomes spoken text, these sentences can be understood easily. However, when it becomes written, it is hard to understand. Based on learner's background in learning and practicing English through debate, it is possible that the learner is getting used to the spoken form of English, but gets limited chances in writing English. Moreover, learner also watches English movies, and is giving English courses for young learners in order to improve her English. All activities that she uses to improve English are in the spoken form. Kravchenko (2009) explained differences between writing and speech. He classified the differences into sentence structure, precision, and details. He explained that motives for writing are more

abstract, more intellectualized, and further removed from immediate needs. In written language, we are obliged to create the situation and to represent it to ourselves. This demands detachment for the actual situation.

Another error found in the learner's writing is about grammar. The first error is about the present tense. She writes "remote area is only consist…", however it should be 'remote area consists of'. In the same line, an error is also found in the relative pronoun. It is written "remote area is only consist of land where located in….". It should be "which is located". She also makes an error in grammar on the idea of passive voice by writing "They are people who almost never be touch by government program." It should be "never be touched". However, the learner only makes errors in these sentences, but she writes other sentences correctly even if it has the same structure with the wrong one. For example, the writer writes "to be served" and "will be helped" correctly.

Corder (1974), describes three types of error according to their systematicity:
1. Pre-systematic errors that occur when the learner is unaware of the existence rule in the target language.
2. Systematic errors that occur when learner knows the rule, but it is the wrong one.
3. The post-systematic error that occurs when learner knows the correct target language, but they use it inconsistently.

Regarding the Corder explanation, it can be concluded that grammar mistakes done by the learner are a part of post-systematic error. It is because the learner can write the correct sentences without mistakes, but inconsistency is founded.

3.3 Summary of analysis

Based on the analysis of both written and spoken data, this learner can be categorized into a good English learner. In the speaking context, she tends to manage the content of speech, ability to use fillers, and has a good fluency. According to Housen and Kuiken (2009), L2 acquisition is concerned more with fluency rather than accuracy. In the writing context, she is able to use appropriate grammar, however, sometimes inconsistency is still founded. Her writing is also easy to follow, even if sometimes informal and spoken forms are still found in her written text.

If we compare between her speaking and writing, we can see that she makes fewer errors in speaking. Based on what I have explained in the writing analysis, it is affected by her learning background. Even if she got the formal education in school, she is interacting more with the spoken activity now. She is learning through debate which focuses on the ability to persuade, and teaching young learners that need a lot of speaking interaction, and learning English through movies which also uses spoken. Coffield et al. (2004) stated that there is wide acceptance of the learning concept. However, until now, there is disagreement on how to measure the best learning style.

If we combine both spoken and written, it can be seen that lexical and grammar are problems that mostly appear repeatedly by the learner. It is in line with the result of the interview related to learning difficulties. In that interview, she said that she has difficulty in grammar. On the other hand, both of her spoken and written data indicates that she has achieved the competency to convey messages in context. It is supported by Ellis (2006) who said that

sometimes L2 learners have the ability to convey messages even if they are still lacking grammatical accuracy.

4. Future recommendations

Since grammar accuracy and lexical are problematic in both spoken and written data, several recommendations to help learner improve those problems are being concerned. The first recommendation to help the learner with grammar is by using focus on form practice. Doughty and Williams (1998) explained focus on form as a practice that explicitly draws students attention to linguistic features by using meaning focus activities context. The learner then can see the relation between language form and communicative function.

A previous study conducted by Cho in 2011 will be a good example in this recommendation. The study is about the use of authentic materials in teaching grammar using focus on form technique. Mishan (2005) cited in Cho (2011), stated several benefits of using authentic materials for language learning. Those are:

1. Authentic texts provides the best source of varied comprehensible input for language learners
2. Authentic texts impact on motivation, empathy, and emotional involvement
3. Authentic text suited to a naturalistic, consciousness-raising approach to learning grammar of target language

Learning grammar using focus on form and authentic materials also matched with the learner's background. Since she is a debater, she will need to know the current trends and issues. She also practices her English through debate that uses communication base. Therefore, it will be useful for her to read authentic materials in order to analyse and understand English structure as well as using authentic materials as her source to help her in the debate. This grammatical structure that she reads from authentic materials then will be used by her to construct her speech that will be a good practice for her speaking and writing ability.

The difference between what she has done before and now is that now she is giving attention to both materials and grammar, while before she only paid attention to the materials. Mariani (2010) said that interaction will help learner in automatizing what they have already known.

Since lexical is a part of the vocabulary, learner needs a strategy to learn about English vocabulary. Nation in Nunan (2003) suggested that group of words should be learnt as a unit to help the learner develop their vocabulary. This learning can help the learner to understand both single words and multiple words easily. This is in line with the learner's difficulty in differentiating suffixes.

An activity that can be created for the learner is using English movies. Since she loves to learn English through movies, she can write some words based on movies, and try to make the group of words and do it repeatedly as her practice. Learning English through something that she chooses is a part of learning autonomy. Benson (2007) stated that autonomous learners have their own responsibility in determining their purpose of learning, content, rhythm, method of learning, and also monitoring their progress and evaluating their outcomes.

Those activities can be categorized as cognitive strategies. Oxford (2003) stated that "cognitive strategies enable the learner to manipulate the language material in direct ways, e.g., through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, reorganizing

information to develop stronger schemas (knowledge structures), practicing in naturalistic settings, and practicing structures and sounds formally.".

Conclusion

In conclusion, this case study aims at understanding a particular learner's strength and weaknesses in speaking and writing. The interview was held to understand the learner's background of English learning. Based on the interview, speaking and writing activities were given in order to obtain the data to be analysed. Based on the analysis, the learner has some weaknesses, but overall, she shows good result as an English learner. Results of data that have been analysed then become a resource to give the learner future recommendations that might help her to improve her English and speaking in the future. This case study is in line with Ellis (2008) who stated that transfer errors are happening more in adult learners compared to young learners. That is why in order to analyse it, we need to know what learners do correctly and also what learners do incorrectly.

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