



The Investigation of Questioning Modifications Used in EFL Classroom

AUTHORS INFO

Siti Sarah Fitriani
Syiah Kuala University
ssfitriani@gmail.com
+6281260204944

Cut Aulia Makhsum
SMAN 6 Lhokseumawe
zataulia@gmail.com

Iskandar Abdul Samad
Syiah Kuala University
iskandar.abdul.samad@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

ISSN: 2502-6909
Vol. 1, No. 2, November 2016
URL: <http://usnsj.com/index.php/JEE/article/view/JEE017>

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Abstract

Questions raised by a teacher as a part of teacher talk is important to stimulate students' participation in English Foreign Language (EFL) classroom interaction. The questions posed by teachers in the classrooms are sometimes modified when they notice that the students have difficulties in understanding the questions. This study investigated four types of questioning modifications –repetition, narrowing by means of clues, rephrasing with alternative or “or-choice” questions and wait-time– proposed by Chaudron (1988) used by a teacher in one bilingual senior high school in Banda Aceh. Six sessions (altogether 480 minutes) of classroom observation were conducted. A dominant questioning modification type was indicated as a result of the analysis of video recordings from the observations. In addition, the reason of the teacher to use the dominant type of questioning modification is also discussed in this paper.

Keywords: teachers' question, questioning modifications, classroom interaction

A. Introduction

In the classroom, a teacher is a key person to stimulate interaction. Interaction or turn talk can occur if teachers are able to encourage students to participate in a classroom where a language is the focus of learning. Therefore, employing strategies to encourage students to talk during teaching-learning processes is important. Some scholars (e.g. Brown, 2001; Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Nunan, 1991) conclude that asking question is one of teacher's strategies to get students talked and participated in the classroom lesson.

The use of different types of questions by a teacher stimulates students' participation; however, the questions alone do not guarantee for improving classroom interaction. In fact, the consideration to employ questioning modifications will provoke oral student's response and improve students' grammatical competence (Wu, 1993). The main problem found in most English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom settings, including in Indonesian schools, is that teachers tend to ask more knowledge or comprehension questions, which require recall

information or recognition, without considering students' critical thinking. Lack of questioning modifications or strategies used by the teacher in the classroom is another obstacle to develop interactive environment and to reach learning language goals as stated in the Indonesian curriculum. Accordingly, it is important that teachers are able to ask any types of questions appropriately for any levels of students, and employ questioning modifications as one of strategies to follow up students' responses or absence of responses (Moore, 2007).

Questioning modifications are essential aspect in classroom interaction to improve the quality and quantity of students' responses and attention in learning process. Every question posed by teachers is expected to be answered by students. Unfortunately, not all questions are responded by students. This study assumes that the inability of students to respond appropriately is due to some reasons, for example, unclear, long and complex questions which are difficult to understand. When these circumstances keep happening, the classroom interaction remains non-interactive. Thus, questioning modification is important to stimulate students' responses and participation.

There are various questioning modifications that can be used in the classroom, for example, probing, repetition, wait-time, rephrasing with alternative, paraphrase, simplification, decomposition, and code switching. Wu (1993), for example, claims probing as one of the most appropriate questioning modifications to prompt or provoke students' responses. Additionally, Nunan (1991) proposes repetition, paraphrase, wait-time and slower speech as common speech modifications used by teachers. This study, however, used the framework modifications proposed by Chaudron (1988). He concludes four models of questioning modifications in the classroom, they are: repetition, narrowing by means of clues, rephrasing with alternative or "or-choice" questions, and wait-time.

Some studies related to questioning modifications in EFL contexts have been conducted by different researchers. One of them was studied by Yu (2010) in Qingdao University of Science and Technology. Her study focused on the types of questions and questioning modifications used by an EFL teacher (e.g. repetition and wait-time (pauses)). A parallel study of questioning modifications in different EFL context was conducted by Moritoshi (2002). He looked at modifications used by a teacher in terms of self-repetition, pauses, rephrasing, translation into Japanese and code-switching. Another study on questioning modifications was conducted by Farooq (1998) in Japan. His study focused on two types of modifications (teacher's wait-time and rate of speech). Although previous studies have focused on various types of questioning modifications, this study specifically investigated teacher questioning modification which is based on four questioning modifications proposed by Chaudron (1988). Hence, this study posed the following research question, "What is the frequency of each type of questioning modifications (repetition, narrowing by means of clues, rephrasing with alternative or "or-choice" question and wait-time) used by the teacher?" After finding the frequency of questioning modification, this study posed another question, "Why does the teacher modify the questions?"

B. Literature review

Questioning Modifications

Teachers need to be responsive in employing questioning modification (Wu, 1993) because it is important for some reasons. Hamiloğlu & Temiz (2012) point out that employing a good questioning modification can support teachers to use contextual teaching-learning. Contextual teaching-learning can lead to communication and negotiation of meaning. It also provides students with dialogic process to attain knowledge of real-life context. Moreover, different types of questioning modification have different purposes, for example, Wu (1993) suggests that questioning modifications like probing and decomposing are important to prompt students' utterance and to increase students' linguistic competence. For most of the time teachers modify their questions, they assume that this enhances and facilitates comprehensibility (Chaudron, 1988). Accordingly, an investigation into teacher questioning modification becomes an important area of research in an EFL classroom.

In deciding the types of questioning modification used in this study, it is important to take into account some classifications mentioned in the literature which seem to be overlapped. Reviewing and comparing research on modifications in teacher talk has been pioneered by Chaudron (1988). He has studied teacher talk for a long time, and he concluded some modifications in the classroom teacher talk into some types. In particular, Chaudron (1988) proposed four modifications of questioning; repetition, rephrasing, narrowing by means of clues, rephrasing with alternative or "or choice" questions and wait-time. Further, other

researchers (e.g. Nunan, 1991; Richards & Lockhart, 1996) have discussed modifications based on Chaudron's extensive analysis.

Another classification of questioning modification is proposed by Moore (2007), and he concluded five modifications. First, *redirecting* is when the teacher asks several students to respond. Moore (2007) argues that this is an effective way to build greater participation in the classroom talk. The second one is *wait-time* which is mostly proposed by other researchers (Chaudron, 1988; Nunan, 1991; Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Third is *halting time* which is similar to wait-time. Halting time is useful when teachers give difficult learning materials or directions. Fourth is *listening*, which is to listen to the learners. This modification is useful to develop the use of silent time after a student finished answering the question. So the teacher has to construct further questions or comment on students' answer. The last is *reinforcement*, which is the way the teacher reacts to the answer by giving appraisal, accepting without comment, or continuing the lesson.

The above classifications of questioning modifications have been developed based on different contexts of studies and frameworks. Chaudron (1988) identifies four types of questioning modifications which were derived from his taxonomy of speech modifications in teacher talk in ESL contexts. Meanwhile, Moore (2007) develops his taxonomy of questioning modifications for general instructional processes in the classroom. It is either used for language teachers or other teachers teaching other subjects. However, his suggestion on the wait-time technique in asking questions was one supported by Rowe (1974). Even though various types of modifications are classified from different perspectives, the one proposed by Chaudron (1988) is employed in this study considering that Chaudron (1988) is the leading of reviewing and collating research on speech modifications (Moritoshi, 2002; Yu, 2010). As well, questioning modifications suggested by Chaudron (1988) are among the most frequent modifications utilized by the teacher in both ESL and EFL contexts. The concise explanations of four questioning modifications proposed by Chaudron (1988) are therefore presented here.

Chaudron (1988; p. 45) explains that "repetition is an exact repeating of a previous string of speech (either partial or full, and either a self-or other repetition". Moreover, repetition of an utterance either unchanged or rephrased used by teachers is assumed to give learners more opportunities to process the input or information in their mind. It also provides opportunities for learners to comprehend or remember the lesson by giving the learners more time to process the input (Chaudron, 1988). Narrowing by Means of Clues is the second type of modification used by teachers to help students get close to the expected answer. Clues can be such as characteristics or features of something being learned, comparison or contrast of something, or a label provided to lead to the expected answer (Chaudron, 1988). Narrowing down some probable answers by providing some clues can help students to respond to the questions easier (Tsui, 1995 as cited in Pearl, 1995). Pearl (1995) claims that providing clues to get students' response can in one hand make the question easy to answer, and on the other hand, employ a certain request cognitively and linguistically on students.

Chaudron (1988, p. 128) provides the example of the third modification, rephrasing with alternative or "or-choice" questions, for example, "What would you like to drink? [pause] would you like coffee, tea, bear?". Brulhart (1986, p. 31) contend that an "or-choice" question is the one that includes a choice of two or more possible answer such as "Did the rest of you read the article? Or you heard it on the Radio or on TV?" and "Do all the chores? Do all the chores or help?". For the last modification, wait-time, Chaudron (1988, p.128) defines it as "the amount of time the teacher pauses after a question and before pursuing the answer with further questions or nomination of another student". Nunan (1991) claims that the strategy of wait-time used by teachers is commonly before calling students to answer, rephrasing the questions, giving the answers, or pointing other students to answer. The wait-time modification used by the teacher when asking a question was approximately less than two seconds (Nunan, 1991; Richards & Lockhart, 1996). However, Holley and King (1971) propose 5-second wait-time for a minimum wait-time in asking questions

C. Research Methodology

This case study was conducted at SMA Teuku Nyak Arif Fatih Bilingual School Banda Aceh. As a bilingual school, this school obliges the teachers to use more English instead of Bahasa Indonesia as a medium of communication in the classroom. Specifically for English subject, the teachers must use full English. One female English teacher was chosen purposively as the participant of this study. The EFL classroom that she usually teaches consists of fourteen second graders who are also female. In teaching, the teacher used Student's Book and Work Book 3.

This study tried to analyze teacher's questioning modifications used by the teacher during 840 minutes sessions of teaching-learning processes. The teaching-learning process was observed and videotaped. The data were then transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. During the classroom observation, observation sheets and field notes were utilized as well. To answer the second research question, an interview with the teacher was done after 6 sessions of classroom observations using open-ended questions. The interview result was also used to crosscheck the data from observations.

D. Findings and Discussion

This study found that the teacher used the four questioning modifications proposed by Chaudron (1988). These questioning modifications were calculated afterwards and displayed in Table 1. The table indicates the most dominant to the least type of modifications occurred in the classroom. Hence, the modification frequency can be made in percentage as shown in the following table.

Table 1. The frequency of questioning modifications

No.	Types of questions	Code	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Repetition	M1	31	14.6 %
2.	Narrowing by means of clues	M2	64	30.1 %
3.	Rephrasing with alternative or "or-choice" questions	M3	62	29.2 %
4.	Wait-time	M4	55	25.9 %
Total			212	100 %

The findings of this study, as indicated in the table, are different from a study conducted by Yu (2010). She discovered three questioning modifications namely; repetition, wait-time, and code switching, while this study found four modifications. The most common questioning modification found in her study was repetition, which reached 88.6%. Meanwhile, Moritoshi (2002) found five modifications of questions employed in his study. They were repetition, wait-time, rephrasing, translating, and code switching. For the frequency of modification, Moritoshi's finding was similar to Yu's (2010) finding that repetition was the most common modification used. Moritoshi found that up to 82% of questions were repeated by the teacher. Similarly, Faroq (1998) revealed various modified questions in his study, and the teacher's longer wait-time and self-repetition became the dominant modifications applied. Moreover, Farahian & Rezaee (2012) found that wait-time and providing students enough background are two important modifications need to be considered when asking questions. The framework used by the previous studies to analyze questioning modification is based on different experts; therefore, some types of modification found in those studies were not investigated in this study.

While repetition is found as the most dominant questioning modification in some previous studies, this study listed narrowing-modified question by giving clues (30.1%) as the leading type among other modifications which is based on the results of the classroom observations. Clues were more important in this study as the teacher confessed that they are forbidden to speak other languages instead of English as mentioned in the interview:

[E1] *We need [to provide clues], it's really important, because we cannot speak Indonesian here. So I have to use any words or any clues, like gestures.*

Additionally, rephrasing with alternative was the second dominant modifications used in the classroom (29.2%). Although the students understood the initial question, the teacher rephrased her questions as she wanted to avoid using more questions for checking comprehension like "do you understand?" This aim was depicted in the next recall interview conducted during post-observation:

[E2] *I don't really like to ask "do you understand", sometimes when we ask like "do you understand" it sometimes like they are not too smart to understand our questions. So, I don't want them to think about that one.*

Obviously, rephrasing has provided more input for the students, as a result, the silence of the class can be decreased. The frequency of rephrasing used by the teacher in this study, which is 29.2%, was higher than the rephrasing found in Moritoshi's (2002), which is 15%.

The other two modifications, wait-time and repetition, were respectively found as the third and fourth ones used by the teacher in this study (55 times or 25.9 % and 31 times or 14.6 %). The longest wait-time occurred in this study spent 1 minute and 20 seconds. The longest wait-time occurred when the teacher asked students about vocabulary meaning. The teacher gave

opportunity for the students to look up dictionary because she really wanted her students to know the meaning of a word being asked. So, she gave a longer wait time for the students to respond to the question. Moreover, there are three long wait-time modifications used by the teacher to ask students' preference about something and to inquire grammatical pattern. Even though the wait time is longer, this study found that it encouraged students to produce a longer response. Mirroring the discovery, the teacher seemed really wanted to get a response from her students. The aim of the teacher to use wait-time modification was disclosed in post-observation interview with the teacher which is recalled as follows:

[E3] *So maybe sometime she [student] still cannot answer, I will try to give some clues until at least she talks after being given wait time, if it only one word it's ok, but no problem, at least she tries, but the most important thing is she wants to try, that is what I want.*

This study also found out the reason of the teacher to use repetition as a modification in asking question. Repetition was used by the teacher for many times before the expected response. The teacher also repeated her question when she inquires responses from students. Apparently, the teacher used repetition in order to make her students understand the question as revealed in the next recall interview during post-observation interview:

[E4] *Sometimes they don't understand the questions, so I need to simplify it, to remind again, for example when I see no reaction from students, rather than saying "do you understand" I like to repeat or simplify my question.*

E. Conclusion

Successful classroom interaction can be achieved when both teacher and students actively interact to each other. The questions raised by the teacher can stimulate students to speak. The finding of this study indicates that when a teacher asks questions to students and she/he found no response coming from students, the teacher needs to modify the questions to be understandable and respond-able. Moreover, since the school, which is bilingual, obliges the teachers to use full English in EFL classroom, narrowing by means of clues was indicated as the leading modification employed by the teacher in this study. This has implied that the frequency of using different types of modification depends on the context of the classroom as well the school. This study also found that the question modification initiated by the teacher was for some reasons: encourage students to speak in target language, avoid a silent classroom, and help students to understand the questions being asked.

This study is not without limitations, for example, the investigation of modification frequency in the classroom was based on the observations of only one female teacher. Hence, further researchers are suggested to investigate the use of questioning modification in an EFL classroom by observing more than one teacher. Comparing questioning modification by female and male students will also be an interesting topic of investigation in this area.

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