

Tertiary Students' Problems In Spoken English As A Foreign Language: Case Study

Muamaroh¹, Nurhidayat², Sri Lestari³
Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta

ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to investigate tertiary students' problems in spoken English as a foreign language. There were five respondents from two universities: one public university and one private university. The study used in depth interview as an instrument for gathering data. The data was analyzed qualitatively. The study found problems in doing individual assignment given by the lecturer in the classroom, problems in group work in the class, problems in face to face lecturing in the class and problems regarding to independent self-study outside the classroom.

Keywords: spoken English; tertiary level; English as a foreign language

1. INTRODUCTION

English is a universal language and it is understood all over the world (Carmen, 2010). Moreover, in Indonesian context, English plays an increasingly important role in particular at the tertiary level (Halim, 2011, p. 103) even English competence is as one of the requirements for applicants to enter postgraduate programs whether master or doctorate program (Emilia, 2005, p. 8). This is in line with the spread of English in Asia has been propelled by economic factors and the highly active technological development in China, India, Korea, and Taiwan (Bolton, 2008). English is increasingly becoming a world language which is used large in China, and India. All these speakers of English use it their own way (Markus, 2008), it is also true in Indonesian context.

The globalization of the world economy even in politics, and culture trigger people to communicate more with others from all over the world in English. Therefore English learners' communicative competence, especially their oral communicative competence, is becoming increasingly important (Shen, 2013). All the companies in particular for multinational companies are recruiting only those applicants who speak fluent and correct English (Carmen, 2010). Increased opportunities for communication in the world created a demand for oral proficiency in English (Black & Cameron, 2002). According to Bamgbose (2001), English becomes the common language among people of different native tongues in the world. Nowadays, English is as the international language which used to communicate not only with people from overseas but also within or outside one's own country (Tsou and Chen 2014). Furthermore, the role of English is as the world's lingua franca, although it has not made it a homogeneous language (Markus (2008). The study of English changes from academic discipline in particular for students of linguistics or literature, to a basic language skill to anyone who wants to participate in today's integrated economies and societies. (Tsou and Chen 2014)

Among the four language skills, spoken English is a skill which is important for students to communicate orally to other people at international forums. Since it is used to communicate among people around the world even it can show someone's status symbol. Carmen (2010) states that "Today's generation looks down upon anyone who is unable to speak English. It has become more like a status symbol". In today's world speaking English has become a necessity (Carmen, 2010). This statement is supported by Markus (2008) who also stated that "In many countries of the world where English is taught and used as a foreign or second language, the main focus is on competence in reading and writing, irrespective of the fact that today English plays an increasing role as a medium of spoken communication".

Consequently, the teaching of speaking skills has thus become increasingly important (Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011, p. 288) in particular at tertiary level in Indonesia. With

increasing globalization, spoken English teaching is playing an increasingly important role in China (Li and Shi, 2012). This is also true in Indonesian context. Graduating from university, students have to be able use their spoken English well to get a good school in particular if they take international standardize test, to get a better job which interview held in English or to be promoted in the workplace (Siregar, 2010, p. 70).

Carmen (2010) argued that there may be students who are able to write a report or something in English well or fairly well. In contract, they find it hard to speak English. They speak English in a clumsy and unclear way. Most of the words remain on the tip of their tongue. They tend to fall back upon their mother-tongue - or become tongue-tied. It is also true in Indonesian context. The spoken English is still a barrier for Indonesian students (Sembiring, 2003; Muamaroh, 2009) even they are not confident to use their spoken English (Muamaroh, 2013).

The recent curriculum named Curriculum 2013 focuses on students centered to provide them use their spoken English more during the lesson in the class. However, it is found that there are a lot of tertiary students who still cannot use their spoken English actively. It is a great obstacle for them to use their English and it is relevant in Indonesian context and also in other countries that consider English as a foreign language. As result, this study investigated students' problems in particular in their spoken English. It is an important research since there has been not many research focusing on this issue within Indonesian context and in particular at the tertiary educational level.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The participants of this study were from two universities in Central Java. Two students were from public university: one was second semester and one was fourth semester. Three students were from private university: one was second semester and two students were fourth semester. They attended speaking English class which chosen randomly. Their majors were English department students and their age was from 18 – 20 years old. They have been studying English for six years before entering university even more. Because some of them took English course when they were in junior and senior high school even in the elementary schools. However, most of them seldom practice speaking English outside the class even practicing to speak English to native speakers. Since English is as a foreign language where the environment is not conducive to communicate English openly. They only used their spoken English when they were in the speaking English class which run 100 minutes once a week in one semester. The instruments used to gather data was in depth interview which used Indonesian to get more detail data. The data was analyzed qualitatively.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of depth interview, tertiary students' problems in spoken English consist of problems in doing an individual assignment given by the lecturer in the classroom, problems in group work in the class, problems in face to face lecturing in the class and problems in independent self-study outside the classroom. Each of them is described clearly below:

3.1 Tertiary students' problems in doing individual assignment given by the lecturer in the classroom

Students faced problems in studying spoken English related to individual assignment given by the lecturer in the classroom were feeling of nervous, not confidence, not having extensive English vocabulary and not mastering the structure. The following are the results from interview:

SRY: "I fell nervous. It is usually I don't know what to talk about. So speaking is difficult. [I] am less of fluency [in speaking]. It seems I don't study, although in fact I study".

SRY: “Not having extensive English vocabulary and not mastering the structure of sentence, and the feeling of not sure

SAR: “I sometimes do not master vocabulary and the structure of sentence that I use. I am not sure if I have to speak [English] in front of the class”.

SRA: “In doing TOEIC test, [I] am still confused in identifying word error. Honestly I am still confused. I still get difficulties to analyze word errors. For the listening and reading sections. *Alhamdulillah* I can do it well”.

3.2 Tertiary students' problems in studying spoken English in group work

Students not only get difficulties in doing individual assignment but also in working in group. Based on the interview, the problems which emerge in group work were related to pronunciation matter. Students were ashamed if they were corrected their pronunciation by their group members in the progress of their English speaking, the different level of group members' competence in spoken English skills and some students can not cooperate well to work in group. Other reasons were considering group members' perception. Some students are afraid of being judged as arrogant if they always speak English during they work in group. Then lack of practicing speaking English among classmates and the last was feeling of anxiety to speak English among group members. The following are the results from interview:

SRA: “Her pronunciation is different from mine. [She] says how to pronoun these words is like this... and that... She ever took English course and I also ever took course but it was long time ago. I forget how to pronounce [the English] words [correctly]. Then she felt, it seems that she is the most correctly to pronounce [English] words, so I am ...hesitant [to speak English]”

SIH: “Emm... I have experience in group work. It sometime there is someone in group who is clever, diligent. She seems emm... she does not want to discuss the assignment [from the lecturer] together but she does it herself. She thinks that other group members do not have competence [to do it], or if she asks us to do it, emm... we feel uncomfortable”.

SII: “English students some of them are good at speaking English but others are not, and most of them like that speaking English only just little and not fluent. So I carefully selected friends and I keep the opinion from other students about me, later [I don't want] they think that I am arrogant if I always speak in English. They will talk “that person always speak in English” so this makes me like...emm... not uncomfortable”

SRY: “I seldom speak [English] with my friends. In speaking class, when they speak in front I pay attention whether they speak English correctly or not, so we notice each other”.

SAR: “I am in pressure to speak English in pair. I notice my partner speaks English not so fluent. I think she/he is also nervous and at the same time I also feel anxiety. I am worried if I speak [English] with someone who is not fluent in expressing ideas. Ee ... what I am thinking when I work in pair, when my partner does not ee... does not express his/her opinion clearly or eee does not speak [English] fluently. What I am thinking how the way to make my partner understand [with what I talk about], such as we understand that we ask to make dialog about scenery or something else”.

SAR: “Ee ...if in group work, say if in one group ee ee... we are asked to discuss about something, and I get the last turn to talk about it. This makes me worried. Because the first student who gets the turn and the next students who have different opinions [give their opinion about it] in group. I also have different opinion about it, but I am worried to speak in the group because ee...ee my opinion about the topic that we discuss ...ee... 70% has been presented by my friends'. Eee...ee... because 70% description about the topic has been discussed so I have to search additional sentence to express my opinion and that may be happened spontaneously and fast. This makes ee...eee my feeling and my heart worried to express my opinion. Because the opinion may have been presented by my friends”.

3.3 Tertiary students' problems in studying spoken English in face to face lecturing in the classroom

Problems faced by students related to face to face lecturing with the lecturer in the classroom based on the interview were the lecturer corrected students' pronunciation in the progress of speaking. This makes students are afraid of trying using their English in front of the lecturer. Second, the lecturer's attitude who is irritable, when students make English mispronunciation. Third, being afraid of getting bad score. Fourth, the lecturer speaks English unclearly. Fifth, not allowed bring the note, not given preparation time and not mastering materials. The following are the results from interview:

SIH: "I am not sure to speak English in front of (Miss F). I am afraid because she is so strict. I see my friend mispronounce of English words, therefore she got angry from the lecturer who is angry using English. She corrected her [her pronunciation] "you should pronounce like this...this..., who is your lecturer who taught you pronunciation in the first semester? She asked. The effect is I am not confidence and confused, not feel free to speak English with her [the lecturer]. I feel not sure whether my speaking right or wrong. I am confused.

SIH: "Speaking em... em... I am afraid if I fail. I think that for the mid and final exam are very difficult. I thought that I fail because I emm I stop in the middle of [my speaking]. I don't study to memorize my texts. I have to understand what I talk about. [Mrs F] looks at me strictly which makes me afraid. That makes me 'blank', what I have to talk about, what after this... what I have to talk after this 'aduh I feel 'blank' in the middle of my speaking. I thought emm the lecturer seems angry, [I blame myself] why I don't study more for mid exam. This makes me afraid.

SIH: "Something that makes me anxiety is when I thought by Mrs MD. He is a senior lecturer. His English speech is unclear and this makes me afraid eemm ... because he makes questions of the test which are exactly the same with what he talks about [in the class]. It is serious and [I] do not lie about this. But I am lucky *Alhamdulillah* I got B compared to others. My friends get BC, C, D. I don't understand about this [his characteristics] at the beginning. I just write what he talks about [in the class]. The way he teaches is not clear

SRY: "Yes.. There are some lecturers who permit us to bring note while speaking in front and others do not. If it isn't permitted then I don't bring it. If I don't bring the note, I memorize it. I just read it based on my ability. So if my ability is only like this... yes like this. If the teacher is angry to me... that's fine. If I speak in front, I sometime in the middle of my speaking I forget. If I forget and the lecturer scores me whether my speaking is fluent or not. If I am not fluent I will get bad score. In the beginning, [my speaking] is fluent but in the middle I am not fluent. If I am 'blank' usually I compose words myself, for example we talk about holiday, then we just em... em..., just talk about holiday goes to somewhere spontaneously. Actually the lecturer doesn't know where we really go for holiday so just speak directly".

SRY: "Yes I have to talk spontaneously if I am suddenly asked to talk in English by ee..ee by [my] lecturer. If I am asked spontaneously and I do not understand material yet, I will be anxiety. I ever refused to talk [English] in front. Because I understand myself, I am not ready or ee... e...do not have description. If I have to talk in front then I will be worried, I cannot do anything"

3.4 Tertiary students' problems in studying spoken English in independent self-study outside the class

Problems faced by students when they study themselves outside the class such as at home independently were not mastering grammar, having limited English vocabulary, not mastering good pronunciation, being not confidence, and unconducive environment. It is supported from the results of interview:

SRA: "Grammar is complex, such as there is passive, active. It is complicated".

SII: “Ee... in lecturing it is explained about sixteen tenses and it is impossible ee...I do not know how to use them, I do not understand about the past tense, or present continues, today ...just like that...[confusing]”.

SRY: “If I have to talk [English] to Indonesian, I am not confidence. Yes because our native language is Indonesia so it seems I am not confident, [I] want to talk English to foreigner in relax atmosphere. So not too... ee..sad, if I make mistake in my speaking she/he is not upset

SIH: “In the case of choosing words, if I have to talk I still think,, still think how to say it in English”

SAR: “My vocab and my pronunciation are not good enough”

SST: “I want ... ee because, because I want to speak [English], because I see if someone can speak English well is awesome so I want to habituate myself to speak English. But I don’t know about my friends [whether they want to speak English or not] so I speak English with friends whom I have known well. If I am not close I am shy [to speak in English]. I don’t know [why I am shy]. I just want to talk with friend or have environment which support me to habituate speaking English”

The findings show that some tertiary students still have problems in spoken English as a foreign language. This finding of this research was consistent with the study conducted by Shen (2013) who found that a large number of non-English majors of college English learners in China still have much difficulty expressing themselves effectively.

In view of grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary support the finding of the study done by Li and Shi (2012) who found that 70% of learners in China think their problems in spoken English learning are mixed, 11% learners’ problem is due to improper use of grammar, 8% learners’ problem exists in bad understanding, 7% learners’ problem is due to incorrect pronunciation, 4% learners’ only problem is caused by limited vocabulary. They argued that all the factors of grammar, listening, pronunciation, and vocabulary are equally important and support each other.

The finding of this research is also supported by Liu (2016) who found that most of teachers in China taught functions implicitly, but they taught grammar more explicitly. As a result, students lack an awareness of appropriateness in their learning of spoken English. This is also true in Indonesian context where English teacher focus more explicitly for grammar. Therefore students get difficulties to understand native speakers in social contexts.

In view of working in group, the finding is also supported by Muamaroh (2013) who found that lecturer’s attitude influence students’ in speaking English. Another finding is that classmate in particular group members also influence students’ confidence in using their spoken English.

4. CONCLUSION

According to the results of qualitative analysis, this current study found problems faced by tertiary students in spoken English were from individual assignment, group work, face to face lecturing and self-study outside the class. This study found problems related to do individual assignment given by the lecturer in the classroom were feeling of nervous, not confidence, not having extensive English vocabulary and not mastering the structure. Problems related to group work were related to pronunciation matter, the different level of group members’ spoken English skills, group members’ perception, anxious, and lack of practicing speaking English. Problems related to face to face lecturing were the correction done by the lecturer for students’ pronunciation in the progress of speaking, the lecturer’s attitude, being afraid of getting bad score, and not given preparation time. Problems related to independent self-study outside the classroom were not mastering grammar and pronunciation, having limited English vocabulary, being not confidence, and unconducive environment.

The limitation of this current study related to the number of respondents being interviewed was limited. It was because it was hard to get the time to interview since they were very busy

having the mid test, a lot of assignment and some of them were active in student organization. Due to students and cultural situation, learning facilities and learning context of this study, the findings of this current study may not be generalized in all situations due to limited number of participants, which was limited to two universities consisting of one public university and one private university in Central Java.

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