

A STUDY OF STUDENTS' SILENCE IN QUESTION-ANSWER IN THE
CLASSROOM INTERACTION AT ENGLISH EDUCATION PROGRAM UNM
MAKASSAR)

Studi Sikap Diam Mahasiswa Dalam Tanya Jawab Dalam Interaksi Kelas Pada
Program Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris UNM Makassar)

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research were to find out the causes and the functions of students' silence in question-answer interaction. This research applied descriptive qualitative research design in order to get more understanding about phenomena of students silence. In terms of the participant, the researcher focused on observing the English Education Program students of the First semester at English Education Program UNM Makassar. They were chosen purposively among 4 classes in total. The researcher took one class as the participant. This class consists of 21 students in 2018-2019 academic years. The researcher attended the class to do the classroom observation, and interviewed ten students who are found passive in the class and tend to remain silent. The observation was conducted four meetings, two meeting in speaking class and the rest in grammar class. In doing the observation, the researcher used video recorder to record all the activities in classroom interaction. Interview was conducted using audio recorder to obtain the data concerning the causes and the functions of students silence. The result of observation found the causes of students silence in question and answer interaction which classified into four causes they are socio-psychology factor, cognitive factor, fluency factor, and psychology factor. The initial causes is socio-psychology factor that concern on the students' lack of confidence in expressing their opinion due to a fear of being judged as low competence by their classmates. Cognitive factor includes lack of understanding and unfamiliarity with the topic being discussed. Fluency factor deals with lack of mastering vocabularies in English. Psychology factors that focus on the students behavior deals with lack of motivation in participating orally. While, the function of students silence in question and answer interaction were identified as affecting, revelation, and linkage function. Affecting is such silence that emerge to show respect or kindness to the others. Revelation concern on the existance of silence to get more understanding of what people say, or it implies that silence can be used as the indicator of not knowing or understanding the lecturer's question. Linkage performs silence that is intended to disjoin the students in oral participation because of fear being judged to talk nonsense. It also can be implied that instead of talk blatantly, the students choose not to say a word.

Introduction

The successful of classroom interaction reflects to the application method used by the teacher. Since the role of the teacher to make the class interactive, this demands the suitable method to guide the students to get a better understanding towards material brought in the learning process. Nowadays, teachers have a tendency to put aside the use of the appropriate method. Such condition defines above leads the students to remain silent in classroom interaction. The terms silent regards to when the teacher asks a question, for instance, in clarifying or checking the students understanding about the material, and the students remain silent.

One of the ways in checking the students' understanding is by asking the students in person, but large evidence found that sometimes students do not give any respond at all. This situation tends to create a negative conception from the teacher. In some situation, the teacher may not tolerate this condition because it is difficult to ascertain whether students have understood or not what they have learnt. Hence, a research must be conducted to find out the causes of students remain silent and to identify their inattentiveness during the learning process.

A study about students silence is urgent to do when realizing its emergence that creates the ambiguity. Because of its ambiguous perceptions among teachers, silence frequently leads to negative judgments. The interpretation among the teacher might be varied towards the students silence. The interpretation of silence in the classroom is a set of assumptions that reflect both the teacher and the students.

Moreover, there has been an argument said that the students who remain silent in the classroom interaction is considered to be a failure in learning. It is also considered to make a judgment upon the failure of the teacher in teaching in the classroom. It is supported by Reda (2009) who explores the major elements of students' decisions to speak or be silent frequently depend on teachers, classroom relationships, and students' senses of identity. She also acknowledges that those students not being able to speak in the class are highly affected by particular contexts of class. When the students do not participate actively in the classroom interaction, it

seems like the students are not capable enough of performing their ability. This condition sometimes lead the teacher to assess the students' performance negatively. There are numerously distinctive reasons why the students are silent in the class. Some students, of course, do not speak up in class because they do not engage in learning activities, or they do not understand the material. Other students may not contribute to the class conversation because of lack of confidence. Whatever the reason is, it needs that the class participation is a part of an item to measure the students' ability.

Since there are a growing misconception and misunderstanding pertaining to the students silence among the teachers, the researcher intends to investigate the students silence in classroom interaction by examining the teacher-students types of interaction. This study has to be conducted immediately in order to get a better understanding toward the students silence that has been misinterpreted as a failure in teaching process.

It is possible to conduct this study and examine the students silence through direct observation to the teaching and learning process. While, in determining the causes of students silence, it can be identified through the interview. Since this research will be conducted to examine the silence of EFL students, the researcher intends to observe one of EFL class at English Education Program UNM Makassar. English Education Program o is a kind of department which provides an opportunity for the students to study at double-degree program. The students may come from different backgrounds of their senior high school. Considering this condition, it is really possible to find the students who tend to be silent in classroom interaction

Based on the reason above, this research aimed at investigating two main problems namely; (i) what causes the students silence in question and answer interaction? And (ii) what are the functions of students silence in question and answer interaction?

Research Methodology

This research applied a qualitative research design. Through the design, the researcher collected, analyzed, and interpreted a variety of the data to reveal the causes and the function of students silence in question and answer interaction at English Education Program in the State University of Makassar. Students silence defines as a situation in which the students do not participate actively in classroom interaction interaction dealing with the absence of response for both verbal and non-verbal.

In terms of the participant, the researcher focused on observing the EFL students of the first semester at English Education Program in the State University of Makassar. They were chosen purposively among 4 classes in total. The researcher took one class as the participant. This class consists of 21 students in 2018-2019 academic years.

The researcher applied two kinds of instruments to facilitate this research. Those instruments were classroom observation and interview. The researcher attended the class to do the classroom observation, and interviewed some of the students who are found passive in the class and tend to remain silent. In doing the observation, the researcher used video recorder to record all the activities in classroom interaction. Interview was conducted using audio recorder to obtain the data concerning the causes and the functions of students silence.

In order to collect the data, the researcher attended all teaching activities inside the classrooms in order to conduct learning observation by utilizing recording tools. While recording it, the researcher filled in the observation checklist. At the end of the session, by means of the session of the research, the researcher conducted an interview with the participant. The researcher applied semi-structured interview to get the data about the causes and the functions of students keeping silent in the class. In applying this type, the researcher provided some questions which needed to be asked, but remain flexible so that other information could still arise.

The data were analyzed by following several steps adopted from Gay et al (2006:470) namely: (1) **Reading**. Reading is the first step where the researcher read and wrote memos, transcript and observer comments to get initial sense of data. (2) **Describing**. The next step, describing, involved developing comprehensive descriptions of the participants, the setting, and the phenomenon studied in order to convey the rich complexity of the research. (3) **Classifying**. The data analysis was basically a process of breaking down data into smaller units, determining their import, and putting the pertinent units together in more general, analytical form. (4) **Analyzing** the result of the classroom observation and interview. The data gained through classroom observation was about the students who remain silent in the classroom. While, interview was about the causes and the functions of students silence in question and answer interaction. (5) **Interpreting** the result of recording data, observation checklist, and interview data to be presented in the report.

Research Findings and Discussions

The result of classroom observation has indicated that the emergences of students silence still dominated the classroom interaction especially in question and answer interaction. Several students prefer to be silent toward the lecturer's question due to the reluctance in responding it. Besides being silent, the students also responded through verbal and non verbal responses. Verbal responses refer to question-answer, question-question, and offer-acceptance. Non verbal response refers to shaking. While the absences both of verbal and non verbal responses deal with silence.

Beside that, the researcher found ten students who tend to be silent in classroom interaction. Those students have been chosen as the subject of this research to be interviewed when considering their reluctance in answering the lecturer's questions. Finally, the last step of this observation was interview the participant that has been chosen to identify the causes and the function of their silent toward the lecturer's questions. The causes and the function are elaborated on each

part based on the findings of this research and also compared with other research findings on the field of students silence.

1. Causes of Students Silence in Questions and Answers Interaction

In terms of the students silence, this study concern on investigating the causes of student silence in question and answer interaction. Through this study, it is identified that there are four causes or factors influence the students silence in question and answer interaction. Factors affecting the students silence are not only restricted on socio-psychology, cognitive, and fluency factors as stated by Indrayani (2012), but also on psychology factor according to Juhana (2013).

1. Socio-psychology factors

The first finding shows that social-psychology factors influence the students silence in question and answer interaction. In this sense, some students were silent due to the classroom situation and peer's perception. Those closely relate to socio-psychology factors. The data obtained identify that there are two reasons affecting the students' silence, they are lack of confidence and feeling of having low competence. It is in line with Indrayani (2012) who stated that socio-psychology factors consist of students' interaction with classmates and students' attitude toward their classmates. The depiction of students silence which was affected by socio-psychology factors are performed in the following statement.

Pertama karena saya sedikit kurang percaya diri di depan teman-teman. Kemudian saya malu dan takut salah juga.

First, because I am not enough confident in front of my friends. And, I am a little bit shy and afraid of making mistake.

(Student 1 interviewed on May 20th, 2014)

Kalau saya sendiri bukan karena takut salah tapi karena malu atau kurang percaya diri.

I am not afraid of making mistake; I am just a little bit shy and lack of confidence.

(Student 7 interviewed on May 20th, 2014)

It is found that students were reluctant in speaking because they were not enough confident. Student 1 depicted the lack of confidence in speaking due to the

feeling of shyness to say something in front of their friends. It can be caused by being afraid of making mistake. While, student 7 described the causes of being silent in question and answer interaction not because being afraid of making mistake, but their silent emerges purely because of shyness

Moreover feeling of having low competence and peer's perception become causes or factors affecting the students silence in question and answer. Student 1 in his interview said that the reason of remaining silent commonly affected by his own judgment and peer's judgment about his ability.

Malu kalau teman yang lain berbahasa Inggris sedangkan saya menjawab pake bahasa Indonesia...Saya biasa tahu tapi tidak tahu bahasa Inggrisnya jadi saya diam saja.

I feel so ashamed when my friends speak English while I give responses in Indonesian... I always have an idea. I just do not know how to say it in English, that's way I decide to keep silent.

(Student 1 interviewed on May 20th, 2014)

The previous comment reflects the inattentiveness of the students related to their silence in question and answers interaction which is influenced by the peer's perception. Peer's perception deals with the student's attitude toward their classmates. It involves a fear of being judge by the others, such showing off, seeking of the lectures' attention, and having low competence. Judge of having low competence, for example, affect the students to speak in English. Ohata (2005) believes that students become silent if they fear being valued as low competence students. Besides that when the other friends can express something better with clear analysis and depth explanation, it triggers the students to remain silent toward the lecturer's questions. Students are afraid being judged as incompetent when compared with the smarter one. The smarter peers have a powerful to control the other students' contribution. It is also supported by Morita in Indrayani (2004) which explained that smart students present silences students who thought themselves as not smart students. Morita continues; non-smart students judged themselves as not intelligent and competent as smarter students.

Another case that influences the students not to be active in the class is their own perception. Some students are not really sure about what they are going to say. It also can be seen from one of the statements above which states that student sometimes not enough confidence with their own opinion.

2. Cognitive Factors

The second factor influences the students silence in question and answer interaction is cognitive factors. Cognitive factor concerns on the analysis of students' ability to respond the lecturer's questions. In cognitive factor, lack of understanding about the topic being discussed becomes the core problem of students' inability to respond the teacher questions and to talk more about the topic. Lack of understanding leads the students to have no ideas. As a result, they decide to avoid the interaction with the lecturer dealing with silence because they do not have the idea about the material. As supported by Indriyani (2012), students are silent because they do not have any ideas.

Students 1 in his statement stated that he was silent because of his lack of schema related the material or the topic discussed:

*Saya diam bisanya karena saya tidak tahu materi yang diajarkan sama dosennya. **I usually keep silent because I do not the material that has been taught by the lecturer.***

(Student 1 interviewed on may 20th, 2014)

3. Fluency Factors

The third emerging causes affecting the students silence is fluency. Fluency factors deal with the students ability to use the language easily, well, and quickly. It refers to how the students deliver the information. Students are fluent in speaking depends on the students' ability in mastering the vocabulary and producing the utterances. Indriyani (2012) cited in Liu (2005) argue that one of the reasons for students silence is caused by the lack of mastering vocabularies. Students who lack of vocabularies find difficulties not only in understanding what the lecturer said but also

expressing their ideas into English. Students who lack of vocabularies are difficult to find the words in English that can represent their ideas.

Student 3 admitted that lack of vocabulary leads her to be difficult in understanding the material. It also happened when the lecturer ask her a question; thus Ima becomes reluctant to participate or to respond the lecturer's questions.

*Saya diam karena saya tidak tahu atau kurang paham kalau dosennya menjelaskan pake bahasa Inggris. Biasanya juga saya diam ketika pelajaran bahasa Inggris misalnya speaking atau grammar, saya tidak tahu mau ngomong apa dan terkadang tidak tahu bahasa Inggrisnya. **I tend to be silent because I do not know or do not understand when the lecturer explains in English. I used to be silent in English class such as speaking or grammar, I do not know what to say and sometimes how to say in English.***

(Student 3 Interviewed on may 20th , 2014)

In terms of fluency, the students at ABA UMI were silent because they lack of vocabulary in English. Some students realize that they are low of ability or competence in English, therefore, it hinders them in practicing their speaking in English. This argument is relevant to Juhana (2013) who elaborates that not knowing the meaning of words or sentences can make students feel anxiety to speak. When students have limited vocabularies, it will be difficult for them to convey what they want to say. Having no idea or description of what will be said had reflected the students to be silent when the lecturer offered questions related to the material being discussed.

4. Psychology Factor

It has been mentioned earlier that there are three factors affecting students from practicing their speaking in English class, they are socio-psychology, cognitive, and fluency factors. The result of an interview indicates that the case of students silence is not only restricted on those three factors, but also from psychology factor. In terms of psychology, this factor concern on students' behavior related to their

intention in practicing their speaking. As Juhana (2013) stated that students have psychology factors such as shyness, anxiety, and lack of motivation.

In accordance with the psychology factor that hinders students from practicing their speaking, lack of motivation is found most of causing the students' silence in classroom. Respect to the cases of lack of motivation, Gardner in Nunan (1999) elaborates the causes of students' lack of motivation such as uninspired teaching, boredom, lack of perceived relevance of materials and lack of knowledge about the goals of the instructional program. It is in line with the result of this study where boredom mostly causes the student to participate orally. Some students have been found not to participate orally due to the feeling of bored, hungry, and exhausted. It is also indicated that feeling of a bad mood and lazy reduce the students' motivation in learning; thus, it caused them remaining silent. In this sense motivation is needed to be considered in determining the students to speak and practice their English.

In responses to the issue of student silence, the result of students' interview obtained that psychology factors in terms of lack of motivation has caused the students be passive in speaking or answering the lecturer's questions. It is also felt by student 3 where her silence is much affected by lack of perceived relevance materials and feeling of tired and hungry.

*Saya diam kalau pelajarannya saya tidak mengerti, dan juga biasanya pada jam-jam pelajaran terakhir dimana saya sudah merasa capek dan lapar jadinya saya akan bosan. **I tend to be silent when I do not understand the material as well as in the last lesson where I have felt tired and hungry so it delivers me to get bored.***

(Student 2 interviewed on May 20th, 2014)

Laziness, boredom, and hunger are most likely delivering the students losing their motivation. Lack of motivation influence the students not to engage in learning process. Students' disengagement in learning process deals with the intention in

hindering to practice their English in speaking related to their silence. In terms of the psychology, lack of motivation contributes in influencing the students silence.

2. Functions of Students Silence in Questions and Answers Interaction

It has been mentioned earlier in finding that the function of students silence appears because of students intentional avoidance of talk. It is also revealed that the silence is not merely the absence of sound or lack of communication. Just because the students remain silent in classroom interaction does not mean they have low competence and ability to deliver the speech. In addition, it is not the indication that the students do not know the material being discussed. It is also identified that silence can mean a lot, depending on the students' intention or purposes.

Phillips in Jansen (1994) classifies five functions of silence; linkage, affecting, revelational, judgmental, and activating. Conversely, there were three different functions of silence found in this study; they are affecting, revelational, and linkage.

The initial function of silence was affecting. It functions as affecting when students were silent to show their respect or kindness to others. The silence was expressed intentionally by the students. This is the implication that the students did know what to express, yet they gave a chance to others to speak. Considering that talk to much is possible to hindres another people to participate in speaking, some students choose to keep silent in order to give others chance contributing in interaction. Similarly, Sifianou (1997) cited in Nakane (2007) that silence can be used as a positive politeness strategy when it functions as a sign of solidarity and good rapport. It indicates that silence can be mark of respect to others.

It was also addmited by student 2 that his silence is an indicator of respect to other friends.

Terkadang tujuan dari diam saya juga meskipun saya tahu, saya diam untuk memberikan kesempatan keteman yang lain untuk bisa aktif dan berbicara.

Even though I know the answer, I tend to be silent just to give my other friends a chance to participate actively.

(Student 2 interviewed on May 20th, 2014)

Revelational was the second function of silence. Jansen in Phillips (1994) stated that silence in this function can lead to understanding and self-awareness. It is believed in this function that students remain silent in order to get better understanding of what the interlocutors said.

Moreover, revelational is restricted not only as a way to get more apprehending about the topic but also as a sign by the students of not understanding the question being asked. The depiction of students silence is the indicator of not understanding or knowing the question. Regarding to this, Kurzon (1997) implies that silence can be used as an alternative to verbally expressed 'I don't know,' or 'I did not understand your question'. The preceding extract proves that students silence as the indication of not knowing the lecturer's explanation

*Fungsinya untuk menggambarkan kalau saya tidak tahu, jadi saya ingin dosen itu bisa mengerti ketika saya diam artinya saya tidak tahu. **The depiction of my silence is to let the lecturer know that I do not understand his/her explanation.***

(Student 5 interviewed on may 22nd, 2014)

Last but not least is linkage function. Silence in this function emerges due to the unintentional of the students contribute actively in oral participation. There was a tendency where the students disjoin themselves in interaction besides being judges to talk nonsense. Such silence can be implied that instead of talking blatantly, the students choose not to say a word. The extract presented below concerns on the linkage function.

Tujuan saya diam untuk menutupi diri saya, karena selain saya malu juga terkadang tidak tahu jadi daripada dinilai asal ngomong sama orang saya

mending diam saja. I remain to keep silent just to hide myself of not knowing the lecture's explanation besides being judged to talk nonsense.

(Student 1 interviewed on may 20th, 2014)

Conclusions

The causes of students silence in question and answer interaction that has been mentioned earlier can be classified into four causes they are socio-psychology factor, cognitive factor, fluency factor, and psychology factor. The initial causes is socio-psychology factor that concern on the students' lack of confidence in expressing their opinion due to a fear of being judged as low competence by their classmates. Cognitive factor includes lack of understanding and unfamiliarity with the topic being discussed. Fluency factor deals with lack of mastering vocabularies in English. Psychology factors that focus on the students behavior deals with lack of motivation in participating orally. Therefore, the teachers should do effort to manimize the students silence since it is judged as a failure to participate in classroom interaction.

In accordance with the function of students silence, it closely relates to the students intention in remaining silent. In certain situation, the student decided not to be involved in interaction with their teacher. Regarding the function, this study was identified that the function of students silence in question and answer interaction were divided into three functions, namely; affecting, revelational, and linkage. Affecting is such silence that emerge to show respect or kindness to the others. Revelational concern on the existence of silence to get more understanding of what people say or it implies that silence can be used as the indicator of not knowing or understanding the lecturer's question. Linkage performs silence that is intended to disjoin the students in oral participation because of fear of being judged to talk nonsense. It also can be implied that instead of talk blatantly, the students choose not to say a word.

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