Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

The Long-Term Impact of Learner-Learner Interaction on L2 English Development

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Introduction

It is clear that the interaction approach in ISLA has been studied extensively and that proponents believe that learners may acquire the L2 through interaction, but there are differences in who the interlocutors are and what types of feedback may aid language learning the most. The earlier studies played an important role in revealing the characteristics of interaction and consequently enabled interactionist researchers to explore specific variables related to interaction. There are at least three main focuses of interactionist studies, i.e., (a) discourse moves e.g., modified input (Swain, 1985, 1995, 2005), (b) cognitive constructs e.g., noticing (Schmidt, 1990, 1995, 2001), and (c) L2 development and acquisition (e.g., Spada & Lightbown, 2009; Mackey, 2012). On the other hand, the most commonly investigated variables have been categorized into four domains: those concerning (a) the interlocutors (e.g., L2 proficiency, L1 status, gender, etc.), (b) the task characteristics (e.g., complexity, type of task), linguistic targets, and (d) the interactional context (Loewen & Sato, 2018).

Some interactionist researchers have suggested that the focus of interactional research has been shifting from investigating whether interaction is beneficial for L2 development to how and under what condition it could be beneficial (e.g., Mackey et al., 2012; Pica, 2013; Mackey & Gass 2015; Long 2017). They also have pointed out the need for further research. Mackey et al. (2012) suggested that more replication studies need to be done, particularly to cover the methodological shortcomings which have been mentioned earlier (Plonsky & Gass 2011). With the complexity of SLA and the dynamics of ISLA, Loewen and Sato (2018) believed that there is always opportunity for replication studies. According to them, there are several variables of interaction which can be explored further, including the benefits of interaction on pragmatics; the role of individual differences; social and sociocognitive issues in interaction; interaction in young learners and 'non-traditional' learners; learners' motivation and engagement; and the roles of gestures in interaction. Besides Loewen and Sato (2018) have pointed out an urgent need for longitudinal studies and delayed testing to understand the long-term effects of interaction. Moreover, there have not been many studies investigating L2 learner interactions that occur naturally in L2 contexts (Pérez-Vidal, 2017). Most interaction research occurred in a classroom or in laboratory settings with the results of the latter generally considered as a reflection of their consequences for the L2 classroom (Loewen & Sato, 2018). However, much less is known about the implication of interaction in naturalistic settings on the development of L2 learners. Thus, more studies are still needed

in order to "further our understanding of the effect of interaction on L2 development" and "help extend the parameters of the interaction approach" (Loewen & Sato, 2018: 317).

With regard to peer interaction, the benefits of peer-interaction in L2 learning have been endorsed by many previous studies, which suggest that it provides a good medium for learners to obtain input (e.g., Varonis & Gass, 1985; Eckerth, 2008) and has positive psycholinguistic impact (Sato, 2013; Philp et al., 2014). However, not all studies of peer interaction have supported these notions, noting the lack of quality especially in terms of corrective feedback in peer interaction (e.g., Adams, Nuevo & Egi, 2011; Xu, Fan & Xu, 2019). As elaborated in the previous section, many pesantren institutions, including the one in this study, rely heavily on learners' interaction inside and outside the classroom as a medium for L2 learning and a previous study has reported non-target-like forms by the learners in such an institution (Aziez, 2016), which is common in peer interaction (Sato, 2015; Loewen & Sato, 2018).

To fill this interactional research gap, the present study is longitudinal and scrutinizes the development of English learners in an Islamic boarding school in Indonesia over time using a dynamic usage based (DUB) perspective (see Langacker, 2009; Verspoor & Behrens, 2011; Verspoor, Schmid & Xu, 2012; Roehr-Brackin, 2015). This perspective holds that the development of L2 learners depends on the learners' exposure to and experience with the L2. Larsen-Freeman (1976) argued that frequency of input has a significant role in the process of acquisition. From a DUB perspective, initial conditions of the learners are very important too and, therefore, learners are expected to have different individual trajectories in their development. Learners' personal and linguistic background such as L1, scholastic aptitude, motivation, etc. are assumed to serve as predictor variables, which interact in complex manners and determine the acquisition of the L2. Furthermore, it is also believed that sub-systems of any organism are in some way interconnected and affect each other continuously in the development process (de Bot, Lowie, & Verspoor, 2007; van Geert, 1991). With regard to L2 development, the DUB approach looks beyond the division between linguistic features such as morphology and syntax. Morphology, lexicon, collocations, and sentence constructions are perceived as constructions in a linguistic continuum, which continuously interact as the L2 develop. Therefore, in investigating L2 development, one should examine as many sub-systems as possible to see not only how each sub-system develops but also how they interact.

With regard to English learning in a pesantren, it is also intriguing to see how the English of learners in such institution develop, particularly with the immersive nature of English language learning in many pesantrens in Indonesia including the one in this study. Hammerly (1991) criticized such immersive approach and argues that although the learners were able to attain a high level of communicative proficiency (fluency) with this approach, they tend to fail in terms of linguistic accuracy, leading to 'an error-laden classroom pidgin' since the learners are 'under pressure to communicate and are encouraged to do so regardless of grammar' (1991: 5). Therefore, it is suspected that the extensive interaction of the learners in English outside the classroom in a pesantren with a minimum exposure to the target language and correction from teachers and/or other learners (Bin Tahir, 2016) may lead to a pidginized form of English.

The resemblance of learners' language and pidgin languages has been pointed out by many linguists. Richards (1974) closely compared pidgin languages and second language acquisition (SLA). He argued that both codes can be described 'as an IL arising as a medium of communication between speakers of different languages, characterized by grammatical structure and lexical content originating in differing sources, by unintelligibility to speakers of the source languages and by stability' (Richards, 1974: 77). Schumann's (1978) famous study on Alberto, a Spanish learner of English who immigrated to the United States as an adult, indicated further the similarities between the structures of pidgin languages and the language of L2 learners. Many believe that comparing learners' language with pidgin languages may shed some light on the emergence and development of pidgin and creole languages.

The emergence and development of pidgin and creole languages usually involve extreme case of language in contact such as slavery trades in the past, causing accelerated linguistic change (Levebfre, 2004), and it is near impossible to observe nowadays. It has been argued however that, in the beginning, second language acquisition plays a crucial part in shaping the languages followed by first language acquisition in its development when the speakers' children were exposed to the languages. One failed attempt to imitate such an extreme condition was done by Derek Bickerton and Talmy Givón in 1979, who proposed an experiment in which people speaking mutually unintelligible languages are taught approximately 200 words of English and then placed on an uninhabited island for a year where they would communicate using only the English lexicon while performing agricultural activities (as cited in Master, Schumann, & Sokolik, 1989). Their research proposal was obviously rejected due to the potential dangers to the participants of the

study. Now, the previously described language learning situation in a pesantren may be able to provide this elusive context.

To sum up, we will trace the L2 use and development of students at a pesantren for one academic year, and take two cohorts, first year and second year students to simulate a two-year longitudinal study. There are four main questions that the present study attempts to answer. The questions are the following.

1) How do the learners at a pesantren interact in oral production and to what extent do the interactional features (trigger, corrective feedback, and modified output) occur in the learners' interaction? We will look at first-year and second year students and see if they differ in terms of interactional features.

2) What individual differences in terms of gender, motivation, scholastic aptitude in terms of class rank, age of acquisition of English, and initial writing proficiency predict the English writing development of the learners in the pesantren? Again, we will see if first-year students differ from second-year students.

3) To what extent do the learners' texts change overtime from a Dynamic Usage Based perspective in terms of holistic scores? Do the learners show variability over time or do they not? If not, to what extent do the learners show signs of stagnation in their L2 development? Do the learners show variation among each other? Again, we will see if first-year students differ from second-year students.

4) To what extent do we find elements of pidginization in the learners' L2? Which pidginization features are the most dominant and are there differences among first- and second-year learners?

Method

This dissertation aims to explore the English language development of 138 young Indonesian learners in their first and second year at a pesantren, which emphasizes the use of peer interaction in their English learning process. Since these learners have little access to authentic English, we assumed that based on several theories there is a possibility that their reliance on peer-interaction for learning English could lead to pidginization. Altogether, there are four studies which shape this dissertation.

The first study explores the learners' interaction. It seeks to elucidate how the learners interact in oral production and to what extent the interactional features (corrective feedback, modified output, and self-initiated modified output) occur in the learners' interaction. Moreover, this study also tries to examine how the first-year students differ

from the second-year students in terms of such interactional features. To do this, samples of learners' interaction from both groups were examined for the frequency of which the interactional features occur. Since the frequency of the interactional features turned out to be very low, no statistical analysis was done and the results will be presented in a descriptive manner.

The second study acknowledges the importance of the learners' individual differences in L2 development. Therefore, it attempts to answer which individual differences in terms of age, gender, motivation, scholastic aptitude in terms of class rank, self-reported language learning ability, age of acquisition of English, and writing proficiency predict the English writing development of the learners in the pesantren. Also, this study examines whether there were any differences between first-year students and the second-year students in this regard. In doing so, some statistical analyses were carried out including an independent t-test, a one-way between subjects ANCOVA, and a linear regression analysis.

The third study explores L2 development over time and examines degrees of variability and stagnation. Taking a Dynamic Usage Based perspective, it attempts to answer the question whether the learners' texts change overtime from in terms of holistic scores and whether the learners show variability over time and variation among each other. Also, it seeks to answer whether the learners stagnate at a particular point in time. To determine if there was any significant progress of the learners' writing scores, the pre-post approach was employed. The data were tested whether they are normally distributed and homogenous. If they are normally distributed and homogenous, then ANOVA and an independent t-test were performed. In contrast, when the data were not normally distributed and not homogenous, the data were analysed using non-parametric tests namely *Mann-Whitney* and *Kruskal-Wallis* tests.

Finally, the fourth study explores the written data for signs of pidginization, especially to what extent we find features of pidginization in the learners' language. For this purpose, writings from 20 learners were used in the analysis. The ratio between the number of pidginization features and the total number of words in each text were calculated. The average ratio from the first two sessions was compared to the average ratio of the last two sessions to see whether the learners improve in the sense that they produce fewer pidginization features overtime as they were acquiring English. Results of Group 1 and Group 2 were compared to see whether there was any difference between

the groups. Finally, we also counted the number of occurrences of each pidginization feature to see which features are more common in the learners' L2.

Findings and Discussion

The pesantren where this study was conducted was chosen because, as elaborated in the previous chapters, it utilized peer interaction as one of the primary sources of L2 learning. The students are required to speak English one week and Arabic the next week in their daily communication in the hope that it allows students to have extensive practice in the two languages. Such practice is very common in pesantren institutions across the country including Java (e.g., Aziez, 2016; Al-Baekani & Pahlevi, 2018), Sumatra (e.g., Ritonga, Ananda, Lanin & Hasan, 2019), Sulawesi (e.g., Bin Tahir 2016; Bin Tahir et al., 2017), and even in Papua (e.g., Wekke, 2015). One point that has been consistently reported is the emphasis on peer-interaction and a lexical approach in the language learning practice in pesantren institutions. Observations in the pesantren institutions reveal that learners interact mostly with their peers and very little with more proficient speakers (e.g., teachers). This study aimed to investigate how this peer-to-peer interaction affects the learners' L2 development over time in one academic year in two cohorts, a first-year group with 82 learners (Group 1) and a second-year group with 56 learners (Group 2). This cross-sectional longitudinal design was meant to simulate a two-year developmental path.

Taking a dynamic usage-based (DUB) perspective of language learning, which holds that frequency of exposure and use is the strongest predictor in L2 development, we assumed that with so little authentic input and so much repetition of learners' non-target utterances that the learners might create their own version of English, which would eventually stabilize and be considered a pidginized version. This assumption proved true.

In the first study on interaction, the examination on the learners' interactions shows that the learners in the Group 1 produced noticeably fewer turn takings (n=107) than the learners in Group 2 (n=286). Although the number of turn takings differ quite significantly, the difference in terms of the percentage of turn takings containing non target like (NTL) utterances is not significant. The turn takings in Group 1 contains 54% (n=54) NTL utterances while the turn takings in Group 2 contains 43% (n=124) NTL utterances. In terms of the interactional features, the results from the analyses indicated that the learners produce a very small number of interactional features that are reportedly important for language learning. None of the NTL utterances produced by the learners in

Group 1 resulted in feedback and the only 3 instances of modified output were self-initiated. Moreover, 2 out of these 3 modified outputs were still NTL. In the second group, only 7 negative feedbacks, of which 2 were NTL, were produced by the learners as a response to triggers produced by their conversation partners. There were also 6 self-initiated modified outputs in the second group, one of which was NTL. The findings clearly indicate that peer interaction among the learners in the pesantren lacks the interactional features that can promote language learning. Although there were some examples of feedback that resulted in modified output in Group 2, the quality is still questionable.

In the second study, on predictors for L2 development, a regression analysis was performed for both groups with forced entry including initial writing proficiency, age of acquisition, motivation and gender as predictors to predict the performance on the writing test. Results show that in the case of Group 1, initial writing proficiency and age of acquisition were significant predictors, the latter contributed negatively to the gains. This means earlier acquisition leading to more gains. In Group 2, on the other hand, only the initial writing proficiency was found as a significant predictor. Scholastic aptitude in terms of class rank did show a significant difference in terms of writing scores in Group 1. However, in Group 2, one-way between-subjects ANCOVA showed no significant effect of scholastic aptitude in terms of class rank on the gains when controlled for initial writing proficiency (covariate), but the difference was significant when the covariate was excluded.

In the third study, on L2 development over time, the result shows there is a significant difference in the scores between start and mid as well as between the start and end in the first group. However, there is no significant difference in the scores between mid and end. The results, therefore, suggested that the first group showed significant improvement in the first semester but not in the second semester. In contrast, in Group 2 there was no significant difference between pre, mid and post scores. This means that the learners in Group 2 did not make any significant progress during the one-year period despite the fact that their overall average score is higher than the first group. Then, a regression analyses was performed with gains as the outcome variable and CoV, class ranking and initial proficiency as predictors. Results show that the CoV was a significant predictor of performance on the writing test in both Group 1 and Group 2.

Finally, the results in the study on pidginization features shows indications of pidginization in the learners L2. In the paired-samples t-test, learners in Group 1 show

that they improved significantly by producing fewer pidginization features overtime. Several runs of independent t-tests show that although the learners started differently, with the learners in Group 2 having a significantly better ratio than the learners in Group 1, the learners in Group 1 equalled out in the end of the observation period. This was indicated in the independent t-test results between the post scores of P forms ratio of Group 1 and the pre scores of P forms ratio of Group 2. Moreover, the post scores of P forms ratio from both groups show that they are similar. We also counted each type of pidginization feature and found that both groups produced a rather similar percentage of the features. L1 forms and constructions made up the majority of the features, followed by a lack of inflectional morphology and lack of auxiliary. Instances of L1 mix were mostly found in the earlier sessions. Basic pidgin negation, lack of possessive inflection, and lack of inversion in questions were scarcely found in the groups.

The above findings suggest that learners make almost all progress in the first six months and then they stabilize in the forms and expressions that they use, which may be considered a fossilized system with typical pidginization features. Apparently, as the learners feel that they have a repertoire sufficient to communicate with each other, they do not make much progress anymore (cf. Schumann, 1978). During their interaction, the NTL output they produced was rarely corrected, probably because the learners had no clue that the forms were not target-like. Moreover, they were not asked to teach each other, but to use the L2 to communicate with. What we did see though is that Group 2 learners were more fluent as they took many more interactional turns than their Group 1 counterparts.

It was clear that the learners in the pesantren have only limited exposure to authentic or expert L2 input as the input they receive is mainly from their peers. Moreover, the type of instruction they receive from their teachers is mainly lexically based. The most common form of instruction is by means of a list of words to be used in their daily life. These factors may cause the learners progress to stagnate, as the developmental part of this study suggested. Finally, in terms of pidginization, the findings of Study 4 also suggest a role for the extensive peer interaction in promoting pidginization process. However, the suggested implication of extensive peer interaction on the L2 development still need to be interpreted with caution. Further studies in this topic in the context of pesantren still need to be done since there might be other factors contributing to the stagnation in the learners' English development.

Taking a DUB perspective, which holds that what is heard and used most frequently is what gets settled, the findings are not surprising as the learners only heard each other and were not really exposed to target forms. From a DUB perspective the frequency of use of L2 in social interaction, and the interaction of constructions in the network in the learner's mind (Verspoor & Behrens, 2011; Roehr-Brackin, 2015) is what drives the system. There are no innate systems, so the language learner can only discover and acquire the language through exposure and experience.

Together the findings of these studies suggest that when learners are asked to learn the L2 primarily through peer interaction with a list of given words, they may very well create their own language that suits them well, but it is not target like and may not be understood by speakers from other L2 English groups.

Publications/presentations related to the findings

Development of English as an LX in an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia: A Dynamic System Perspective

International Conference "Multiculturalism and Diversity in the 21st Century", Uzhorod National University, Berehovo-Uzhorod (Transcarpathia, Ukraine)

Wednesday, 28 March 2018

Oral presentation

L1 Transfer of English Learners' Interlanguage in an Islamic Boarding School in Indonesia

3rd Student Southeast Asia Conference, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universitat Bonn (Bonn, Germany)

Saturday, 12 May 2018

Oral presentation

English learning in Indonesian Islamic boarding schools: Learner language or pidginization?

21st Summer School of Psycholinguistics, Pannon Egyetem, Balatonalmadi, Hungary

26 May 2019

Oral presentation

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