

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1 Conclusions

This study has set out to investigate the contribution of FFI strategy and Corrective Feedback (CF) to supplement the existing Grammar lessons, in the efforts to improve the accuracy of eleven Kindergarten-2 students' spoken English. With this objective in mind, a Classroom Action Research (CAR) was conducted in which several grammar lessons inspired with FFI strategy were carried out targeting at specific grammatical forms that were thought to be somewhat deficient in the students, coupled with CF treatment on those forms that was given in all of the interaction between the Grammar teacher/researcher and the students throughout the length of this study (about four months). The CAR was held in three cycles, in each of which planning, acting, and reflection took place. The lessons were videotaped and later transcribed, and spontaneous speech of the students together with the CF given, if any, were noted. The speech samples were subsequently grouped, coded, and analysed. Triangulation was done using document analysis and interview with the Grammar teacher.

In answer to the first research question on the contribution of FFI strategy in the effort to improve the accuracy of the students' spoken English, the analysis revealed that the FFI strategy effected improvement in greater or lesser degree depending on the (English) language proficiency of the students and their general academic performance. The FFI lessons appeared to make positive contribution to four students (Ethan, Mary, Chris, Rick) who were deemed to have high academic achievement. This was concretely shown by the fact that Ethan, an exceptionally bright student, only showed improvement in his usage of plural and irregular past tense forms after the FFI lesson and not after the 'normal' grammar lessons on the same topics that were given previously. It is posited that this favorable result might be due to the 'noticing' (the use of songs and stories to introduce the grammatical concept) and 'proceduralizing' (activities aimed at pushing the students' output of the newly-learned grammatical forms) features of FFI strategy which were absent in the previous non-FFI lessons on the same topics. Another group of two students (Claire and Nick) with fairly good academic achievement also seemed to benefit from the FFI lessons, although their speech performance was not as stable as those high achievers mentioned above. FFI strategy did not seem to succeed in improving specific grammatical aspects of two students; the use of auxiliary 'does' for Mike and the subject pronoun for Ben. It is conjectured that, apart from some shortcomings and unexpected occurrences related to the execution of the lessons, the nonperformance might be mainly due to learners' and interlanguage factors, such as their developmental readiness for the grammatical paradigm involving subject-verb agreement for

auxiliary verbs or the grammatical gender and also the fact that those grammatical features are absent in their native language. Lastly, the FFI lessons were deemed to make insignificant contribution to three students who were rather low-achievers. Student Rod still has not mastered basic literacy skill; Bill might have difficulty with learning motivation, and Martha generally struggled to keep up with the lessons. Generally, they did not pay attention well during the lessons and had to be guided to do the activities or complete the worksheet. Only Martha showed some perceivable improvement after the Irregular Past lesson; she could use some of the verbs taught in her daily speech. However, in spite of the seeming lack of success with those students, it was noted that the ‘noticing’ activities in the FFI lessons, with the use of catchy songs, realia, and stories, did well in capturing their attention and in getting them to participate.

Looking at the individual grammatical forms taught, a rudimentary scoring system revealed that Irregular Past Tense Verbs was the most ‘successfully’ acquired (with roughly 80% level of acquisition), and the Regular Plural form the least (60%). In terms of FFI strategy, the success of the irregular past tense form could be attributed to the use of the ‘My Last Weekend’ story in the ‘noticing’ section which was highly contextual and relevant for the students, the ‘Disappearing Words’ drill in the ‘structuring’ part which seemed to facilitate rote memorization, and also the various forms of positive modeling done by the Grammar teacher and the researcher in other lessons. On the other hand, although the result for the Regular Plural form seemed dismal in that most of the students did not manage to master it very well, it was deemed to be the one that effect most awareness in the students, judging from the remark made by the Grammar teacher and the students’ speech samples. Thus, it could be said that the FFI strategy applied in this topic was fairly successful, although other factors, such as interlanguage and learners’ factors, might have mitigated the effect. The success could be attributed to the more extensive treatment of the topic (two lessons instead of one lesson for the other topics) and, as in the other lessons, the use of a catchy song as the ‘noticing’ media.

The second research question pertains to how Corrective Feedback (CF) could have contributed to the effort of improving the spoken English of the 11 students. Just as before, the effect of CF varied with the academic performance and the personality style of the students. Although the four high-achiever students did not generally need much correction, there was one instance in which Mary was shown to exhibit an improvement in the use of the auxiliary ‘does’ after a correction was given, even before she had the corresponding FFI lesson. It appeared to show how her excellent linguistic ability facilitated her acquisition with just one time correction, in the absence of a formal lesson. Claire and Nick had also benefited somewhat from the CF; there were two instances for each student in which they were corrected on one specific item, and subsequently they could use the same item correctly in spontaneous speech. In general, all of the students

mentioned above were sensitive to the corrections and, to a large extent, were able to make self-repairs or to show uptakes upon corrections. They were mainly given repetitions, which is a prompt type of correction. Just like in the FFI lessons, CF also had positive impacts on Ben and Mike in rather specific ways. Ben showed notable improvement on the use of auxiliary ‘do/does’ after several corrections were given, and, similarly, Mike with the use of subject pronoun. However, just as discussed in the FFI lessons above, Ben and Mike were somewhat ‘impervious’ to the corrections on subject pronouns and auxiliary ‘does’ respectively, such that they did not show much improvement in these topics. All in all, it could be postulated that CF were able to cause much or some improvements in all those students due to its ability to cause the learners to notice the errors, restructure their language, and store the restructured form in their memory, apart from the fact that the students themselves were linguistically competent enough to notice the gap between their production and the target language. The case of Ben and Mike was, as described above, rather isolated in which the learners’ and interlanguage factors came into play. Finally, CF did not bring about notable improvement in the three low-achiever students, as noted in their speech samples. They were largely unresponsive to the corrections and were not able to produce uptakes. They were given mainly the recast kind of correction since it was thought that it could act as positive modeling for them. It will be interesting to find out if the result would be different if they were given more prompts. At any rate, it is possible that lack sensitivity for the correction since they failed to notice the gap between their speech production and the target language, as they did not have a firm grasp of the target language in the first place.

Albeit not being the main objectives of this research, one finding of this study might be worth mentioning here. It relates to the applicability of the so-called stages of development in children’s language acquisition to the students in this study, specifically the morpho-syntax acquisition following Pienemann’s (1998) Processability Structure. A previous analysis of the students showed that they were mostly at Pienemann’s Stage 2, in which irregular past tense and regular plural forms (and morpheme /-s/) are supposed to be acquired early in the children’s lives. The result of this study indeed showed that the irregular past tense form was the most successful grammatical form acquired by the students, looking at how most of the students were able to make use of the irregular verbs taught and the past tense concept in their daily spontaneous speech. Nevertheless, most of the students, with the exception of Ethan, did not seem to master the Regular Plural form satisfactorily even including, unexpectedly, the high achievers. It is conjectured that, in the case of EFL (English as Foreign Language) students in contrast with ESL (English as Second Language) students who were the subjects of Pienemann, other factors such as interlanguage and quality/quantity of input might potentially alter the sequence of development. For the former, the absence of equivalent plural form in *Bahasa Indonesia*, in which the plural nouns do not suffer any

inflection, would signify a notable level 4 in Prator's (1967) hierarchy of difficulty, which might still be too challenging at the students' current developmental level. As for the latter, the lack of salience in the model input (English spoken by the teachers, heard from the media, etc) of the morpheme /-s/ and /-z/ of the plural allomorphs might have caused the students not to perceive it sufficiently so as to facilitate acquisition. The fact that the quantity of the model input is definitely not on the abundant side might also exacerbate the problem. On the other hand, the irregular past tense verbs undergo the so-called 'root changes', such as from 'go' to 'went', which is more overtly marked and therefore more perceptible for the students and, consequently, more easily acquired. This is perhaps why the irregular past tense verbs garnered greater success in this study compared to the plural form, despite the fact that both forms do not have equivalent features in the students' L1. Thus, this study deviates partly from Pienemann's order of morphological acquisition in the sense that the plural form might not be acquired very early for Indonesian students.

Lastly, a final note is in order concerning the result of this research. No claim is hereby made that the success of FFI/CF here indicates that Grammar should be taught to very young learners, nor the failure of FFI/CF signifies that they should not learn Grammar. Granted that this topic is still debatable, it also falls outside the scope of this study. Instead, the purpose of this research was to supplement the existing Grammar lessons with alternative Grammar teaching approach (FFI and CF) in the hope of improving the grammatical accuracy of the students' spoken English. Thus, the only claim the results made was that, should Grammar be taught to very young learners for any requirements whatsoever (school policy, curriculum, etc.), then perhaps FFI and CF could be considered as one of the ways of turning Grammar teaching into learning, in which students could apply what they learned in their daily speech.

5.2 Suggestions

5.2.1 Suggestions for further research

This study has made attempts at FFI instruction for very young learners of English as a foreign language. While research on FFI studies with elementary school students have been conducted, there is a paucity of information for such research being done for very young learners below the age of 6. Thus, researchers in the field of Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) and/or Grammar Instruction might be interested to pursue this same subject with studies of more experimental nature, in order to give a quantitative support to this study. Besides, the fact that this research was done in an EFL context might also add some value to the growing body of research on FFI instruction to young learners, as most of the previous studies were done in the immersion setting. As suggested by Lyster (2004, p. 337), more research on L2 instructional setting is needed

to ascertain the effectiveness of FFI as shown in the immersion context. Therefore, research on FFI instruction with young learners in EFL setting would contribute much to this topic. Another option as further study along the line of this research is to investigate the effect of FFI to the students over time in a longitudinal study, which was also encouraged by Rod Ellis (2006, p. 103).

Secondly, Corrective Feedback (CF) treatment was also applied to the young learners of this study. As was discussed in chapter IV, it was found that CF seemed to be quite effective with students with ‘talkative’ personality. Hence, further research could be conducted on how CF vary with different children personality traits, similar to those performed by Ehrman (1989) on the effect of FFI on students according to their traits in the Myers-Briggs scale (Brown, 2007, p.280). In this study, students with lower academic performance were given mainly the recast type of feedback since they were thought to be unable to provide self repair. However, since previous researches showed that learners with lower linguistic ability responded better with prompt than recast, it would be interesting to see if the outcome would have been different should those students be given the prompt kind of CF instead. Another area for further research concerning CF with young learners relates to the effect of different type of CF, typically prompt and recast, on the instructional setting (Lyster and Saito, 2010, p. 292). In an EFL setting such as that of the present study, perhaps more investigation could be carried out to see whether the children of similar age, personality and profile respond better with prompt or recast. Just like in the case of FFI instruction above, longitudinal study on the effect of CF over time to better ascertain their effectiveness would also contribute much to the knowledge corpus of this topic (Hampl, 2001, p. 81).

With regards to the choice of methodology, Classroom Action Research (CAR) was chosen due to the genuine need to effect immediate changes in the classroom, and its suitability as a research method to potentially cause such changes. In this vein, the researcher would like to encourage other teachers to conduct CAR type of research should there be a need to effect some improvement, since the result could be quite rewarding. Probably, similar CAR type of research under this theme could also be carried in order to find out how, for example, to enhance other aspects of acquisition such as lexical, semantic, phonology, etc., or other grammatical topics such as prepositions and articles. However, the researcher would only like to caution that, should CAR be chosen, a thorough effort at analysis within each cycle should be carried out, in order to maximize the benefits of the cyclic nature offered by CAR.

“Working with spontaneous speech samples is frustrating. One always feels that further analysis remains to be done.” (Hakuta, 1976, p. 347) The researcher certainly echoes this sentiment. Many studies involving children’s spontaneous speech are in the form of case studies of one to a few children, in which their speech transcription and analysis might take years to work out as in the case of Hakuta’s study cited above. In this study, the researcher has attempted to collect the speech

samples of the eleven students diligently through both recording and note-taking, but the feeling of frustration as expressed by Hakuta often crept in when it turned out that there were no sufficient speech samples for an in-depth analysis to be carried out. Thus, it is suggested that future research requiring speech samples will ensure that sufficient sampling is done, perhaps with more reliance on recording system than note-taking.

5.2.2 Suggestions for teachers, headmasters, parents, and teacher trainers

In Chapter I on the possible significance of this study, it was mentioned that this study might offer some benefits for teachers, headmasters, and parents. For teachers, it is hoped that the detailed description of the FFI lessons as outlined in Chapter IV would provide some information into some research-based methods for teaching Grammar to very young learners, as the research literature on this topic is found to be rather meagre. Although these methods should not be foreign to the teachers since they are available in any TEYL coursebooks, it is interesting to see their application in real classroom situation. Considering also the potential benefit of FFI as shown in this study, teachers could also regard FFI as one of their chosen strategy, depending on the individual circumstances and resources available to them. Should FFI strategy be adopted, it is imperative that the appropriate ‘noticing’ media, such as songs, games, stories, puppet shows, realia, etc., are selected. It should also be noted that there should be ample opportunity for pushed output in the ‘proceduralizing’ stage, which could be a challenge for teachers considering the habitual lack of time plaguing any teachers. Besides, this study also highlights to the teachers the importance of Corrective Feedback (CF) as a necessary accompaniment to formal lessons in facilitating language acquisition in children. Since feedback treatment is found to be given rather randomly (Hampl, 2011, p. 81), there is a need for teachers to focus the CF on specific targeted language aspects. In sum, teachers should be familiar with the various types of feedback so as to know when and how is best to apply them. The ‘unplanned/incidental’ FFI, in the form of interaction with the students outside lesson time or positive modeling in other lesson would also be highly beneficial. Here, teacher training could play an important role in the inclusion of all these topics in teacher training syllabus and practice.

For headmasters, this study implicitly showed that it is possible (and perhaps beneficial) to teach Grammar at Kindergarten level, with strategies and techniques that are amenable for the children. Thus, it is not entirely preposterous to include Grammar in the school curriculum, at least at the highest level. From the result relating to the order of acquisition of morphosyntax in children, both teachers and headmasters or other school personnel who are involved in curriculum-making of the school could also obtain some information from this study. For example, since the plural form

seems to be acquired with some difficulty, perhaps more instructional time and resources could be allocated to it. Alternatively, this topic could be placed towards the end of the syllabus when the learners have more schemata on English language paradigm and also vocabulary store to tackle this grammatical structure. On the other hand, although the concept of tense as time markers might seem to be rather formidable for children, it was shown in this study that the irregular past tense verbs are acquired early and so could be included in the beginning parts of grammar lessons.

Lastly, parents could also gain some insight from this study regarding the grammaticality of their children's spoken English. Parents might expect their children to have native-like fluency and grammatical accuracy since the children study in international schools. Nonetheless, parents should be aware of several factors that mitigate the accuracy of their children's spoken English, such as the EFL setting of Indonesia, interlanguage influence, and, more importantly, the developmental stage of each child that affects his readiness to acquire the target language. Thus, should the parents wish to improve the accuracy of their children's spoken English, it is paramount that they provide rich English environment at home and to provide opportunity for practice for English speaking outside school hours.

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