

Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of the Study

As the world's lingua franca in the globalization era, English has established itself as one of the important subjects to be taught, especially in non-English speaking countries. In Asia particularly, there has been a tendency to lower the age at which children begin to learn a foreign language, since it is believed that the earlier a child starts to learn a foreign language, the greater the ultimate achievement will be (McKay, 2006). The increasing number of children learning English as Foreign Language (EFL) is the evidence of the necessity of English learning in the global world.

Indonesia itself, as one of non-English speaking countries in Asia, has introduced English to young learners since the launching of the 1994 Curriculum (Mindari, 2011). Realizing the important role of English in teaching and learning process, the government of Indonesia has set up the policy stating that English can be taught as a local content subject in elementary schools. As cited by Hapsari (2012), based on the Letter of Decision of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 060/U/1993 dated February 25, 1993 about the possibility of English to be a local content subject in elementary schools, it can be started at the fourth grade. In its progress, English which was previously an alternative subject of local content became a compulsory subject. Furthermore, English was not only started at the fourth grade but it was started even at the first grade (Hapsari, 2012).

Nevertheless, there are some polemics since the establishment of K13 (2013 Curriculum) in Indonesia that states English subject is not taught as a local content subject anymore but is shifted as an extracurricular subject in elementary schools. This policy is set up in regards of the national ideology that as Indonesians, young learners do need to learn and acquire their national language first, *Bahasa Indonesia*. English subject is abolished to reduce the students' burden in learning. As affirmed by Tambun (2013), under the new curriculum, which went into effect for a limited number of schools in the 2013-2014 academic year that began in May, the subjects of English, Computer Studies, and Physical Education are no longer part of the required stream for primary school students, but are still available as extracurricular activities. In line with the new curriculum, according to Governor Joko Widodo in Tambun (2013), it was important for primary schools to focus more on *Bahasa Indonesia* to help nurturing students' sense of nationalism. Moreover, he said students should be taught from early ages to appreciate *Bahasa Indonesia* and its culture (Tambun, 2013). However, English subject is more than essential to be taught regularly especially to young learners since English has been a tool for international communication around the world. The English mastery is a trade mark to face the global world as well.

In the implementation of learning English as second language, interaction in the English classroom suits the best, especially for young learners' indirect learning. As mentioned by Lier (1988), children learn their first language by interacting with the meaningful people in their environment. They converse, play games and engage in rituals long before they are able to utter their first recognizable words. Chaudron (1988) also clarifies that conversation and instructional exchange between teachers and

students provide the best opportunities for the learners to exercise target language skills and get useful feedbacks. Parallel with aforementioned ideas with regard to ways of children's learning, young learners acquire a language from direct contacts with language in use, including observing and participating in literacy practices; watching how people read and write for functional real purposes; and participating in literacy events. In other words, language skills are acquired naturally in the context of meaningful oral interaction and literacy events (Wagner, 1989). Hence, successful communication comes from successful management of various interactions, especially in the classroom.

Due to the significance of classroom interaction research, there are also several related studies aimed at investigating the relationship between teacher talk and second language (L2) learning within the classroom discourse were conducted progressively since last two decades (Albright, 1980; Long & Sato, 1983; Chaudron, 1986; Spada & Lightbown, 1993; Johnson, 1995; Jarvis & Robinson, 1997; Cullen, 1998; Seedhouse, 2004; and Walsh, 2006). Several studies have focused on the classroom interaction in young learner language classroom (Piker & Rex, 2008; Li & Seedhouse, 2010).

However, there is a prevalent problem in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom where English is mostly not a language for active communication in Indonesia. The stereotype of non-Asian and Asian culture is widely known as one of the main causes. In non-Asian countries, teachers do not spend large amounts of time-lecturing but try to lead the children in productive interactions and discussions which form the students into active participants in the learning process. In Asian countries, the learning behaviour is mostly teacher-centred learning where all the

information required is supplied by the teacher and the students are the recipients (Tang, 1991; Gow & Kember, 1990). Whilst, according to the Acts of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 Year 2003 Article 1 verse (19), the recent curriculum, K13, pushes teachers to move away from the traditional teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered classroom.

Consequently, Asian students tend to act passively by listening to the teacher and mostly the teacher is talking in the classroom. Moreover, according to Snell (2002), Asian students tend to be trapped in reticence, be unresponsive, and avoid any interaction with the teacher while the teacher is seeking such an interaction by posing questions to a student or even to the class as a whole; which such situation is called as 'culture of silence'. Questions posed by the teacher are forms of classroom interaction with which the teacher is able to analyze the students' level of comprehension. On the contrary, being reticence to the teacher's questions can refer to various possibility causes. First, the students are not able to understand the question because of their lack of linguistic competence. Second, the students lack of self-confidence. Third, the students understand the question but they are not able to reply it in English. Through investigating interaction in classroom discourse, teachers would be able to develop their awareness of applying appropriate teacher talk in teaching, as well as to understand the relationship between pedagogic purposes and language use (Cook, 2008).

As classroom is a place where comprehensible input and modified interaction are available, what goes on inside the language classroom is very important (Krashen, 1982 in Bik-May, 1985). Thus, researches on classroom interaction place a high attention to be conducted as a feedback to teachers about their classroom behaviour. Since high numbers of

classroom interaction exhibits active communication in the classroom, this study is mainly going to find out the communication contents which are expressed by the teacher and the students in English for Young Learners (EYL) classroom interaction to contribute such a valuable feedback in analyzing the teacher's teaching and learning activity and students' comprehension level by adapting the Foreign Language Interaction (FLint) System of interaction analysis (Moskowitz, 1967). After the communication contents had been analyzed, the patterns of interaction between the teacher and fifth grade students in the EYL classroom were identified and then discussed further in the present study of the writer.

Research Questions

Based on the background of study, the writer formulated the problems of the study as follows:

1. What communication contents are expressed by the teacher in the fifth grade EYL classroom interaction?
2. What communication contents are expressed by the fifth grade students in the EYL classroom interaction?
3. What patterns of interaction are identified between the teacher and the fifth grade students in the EYL classroom?

The Purposes of the Study

Based on the statements of the problems, the objectives of the study are:

1. To find out the communication contents expressed by the teacher in the fifth grade EYL classroom interaction.

2. To find out the communication contents expressed by the fifth grade students in the EYL classroom interaction.
3. To identify the patterns of interaction between the teacher and the fifth grade students in the EYL classroom.

Delimitation

The topic of this study is EYL classroom interaction between the teacher and fifth graders who speak English as their foreign language in the different levels of fluency. Since this study aimed to search for various communication contents and patterns of interactions between teachers and students in EYL classroom contexts, it is necessary to conduct observations towards students of the same age in a national elementary school for 5 meetings.

In this study, the subjects are an EYL teacher and fifth grade students from a non-English speaking country. A national elementary school is selected since the purpose of this study is to see the various communication contents of the teacher and fifth grade students whose levels of English competence are varied. The analysis of classroom interaction is focused on what is going on in the classroom: spoken communication which is transferring the information in verbal and non verbal messages, specifically on the description of communication contents which are expressed by the teacher and the fifth grade students of 5 meetings in an EYL classroom based on the adaptation of Flint system and the description of patterns of interactions in the EYL classroom. In this study, the non-English speech is also analyzed since the English learners are young learners who still need L1 in learning English and those from non-English speaking country. *Bahasa Indonesia* which is the young

learners' L1, is used to make those learners understand the teacher's explanation and instructions.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, classroom interaction and second language acquisition are mainly discussed as they relate to each other in achieving the communicative competence. In other words, classroom interaction facilitates second language acquisition. According to Richards & Lockhart (1994), classroom interaction is classified in four major areas : teachers' modification of their language, teachers' questions, teachers' feedback methods, and learners' language use in the classroom.

In order to observe interactions in an EYL classroom, an observation system which is known as interaction analysis is essential to be adapted as the research instrument. A new system of interaction analysis, Flint (Foreign Language interaction) system which includes twelve categories of interaction analysis, is adapted as an observational tool to provide a feedback to the teacher about his classroom behavior (Allwright, 1988).

Definition of Key Terms

To avoid misunderstanding, the following key terms needed are explained as follows:

Classroom interaction is spoken communication which conveys verbal and non-verbal messages, done by locutor (the teacher) and interlocutors (the students) in the classroom.

Communication content is the type of teacher and student talk spoken by locutor (the teacher) and interlocutors (the students). Teacher talk consists of two components, indirect talk (*dealing with feelings, praising or encouraging, joking, using ideas of students, repeating students response verbatim, and asking questions*) and direct talk (*giving information, correcting without rejection, giving directions, direct pattern drills, criticizing students' behaviour, criticizing students' response*) while student talk involves several categories (*students' choral response to the teacher, individual student response to the teacher, student's response to the teacher in L1, student with peer's response to the teacher, silence, laughter, student's nonverbal behaviour*).

Teacher talk is English language which is spoken by the teacher to convey verbal messages, to organize and manage the classroom, addressed to language learners in the classroom.

Student talk is English language used by the students to address their teacher which conveys verbal or non-verbal messages.

Flint (Foreign Language interaction) system is an observation instrument to analyze various interaction between the teacher and students in EFL classroom.

Young learners are children between five and twelve years old who learn English as their foreign language in the Elementary school.

Significance of the Study

This study is conducted with the primary expectation of exposing English teaching practices and pedagogical development concerning the importance of classroom interaction by providing kinds of communication contents and the patterns of interactions expressed by the teacher and the students in the real EYL classroom lesson. Secondly, the results of this study are expected to broaden English teachers' horizon about EYL classroom interaction.

Finally, this study is expected to provide comprehensive descriptions and basis for future studies concerning about the teachers' instructions and variations of classroom interaction in the EYL classroom theoretically.

Thesis Organization

In brief, the writer discusses the background, the research questions, and objective in chapter one. In chapter two, the writer shows the related theories in conducting this study. The theories are the theory of classroom interaction and student reticence among Asian students, theory of interaction analysis and review of related studies. In chapter three, the writer discusses the research method or the steps that she takes in conducting this study. Mainly, she presents the nature and design of the study, data, instruments, data collection and data analysis. Chapter four, the core of the study, is about the research findings and analysis that the writer makes. In the last chapter, the writer discusses the conclusion and suggestion for the future researchers and the improvement of teaching methods.