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## MAKING USE OF THE TEACHERS' QUESTIONS IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE INPUTS

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**Saunir Saun**

FBS Universitas Negeri Padang

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### Abstract

*This paper discusses about using the teachers' questions in developing language inputs: vocabulary, structure/grammar and pronunciation. The language inputs are very important for the students to master because their success in their language use or communication is determined by their mastery on the inputs. However, the mastery of these language inputs becomes a problem for the students due to some causes, namely, the unavailability of English speaking environment, the schools do not provide enough opportunities for optimizing the language inputs due to the limited time available and the teachers of English do not make use of the teaching to increase the students' language inputs maximally. To help solve this problem, this paper suggests the use of the teachers' questions to ask during the teaching process.*

**Keywords:** *teachers' questions, language inputs*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

As a foreign language in Indonesia, English gives a lot of difficulties to Indonesian students who study it at all levels. Being a foreign language, English makes Indonesian students have to work hard to master it because *bahasa* Indonesia they have mastered and English have a lot of differences. The differences mainly lie on the vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. While this three components are very important for one to use the language.

Vocabulary and grammar are involved in all language skills: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Vocabulary is the first language component one masters or understands a language, either as his mother tongue or as a foreign language. A person starts his language mastery from understanding the vocabulary of the language. Even to communicate in that language, to master the vocabulary is more important than the other language components such as grammar and pronunciation.

Grammar is also an important language component to master in order to be able to use the language well and to communicate in a perfect way. However, even though it functions determinantly in good language use, it is not as important and determinant as vocabulary is. Very often we find cases of communication in which the grammar is incorrect or inappropriate, the communication can succeed. In other words, it means the communication between the two sides can still happen. Of course, a better and more fluent communication can happen if both vocabulary and grammar use by the communicators is good.

The other language component which is also as important as vocabulary and grammar is pronunciation. Pronunciation --in general-- is how to pronounce or utter words of the language. It is, of course, inseparable to the vocabulary of the language. Pronunciation also plays a very important role in the mastery of the language because wrong (very wrong) or inappropriate (very inappropriate) pronunciation may result in the misunderstanding by the listener. That is why pronunciation must, at least, be comprehensible to run communication (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983, in Brown, 1994).

From the explanation above, it is clear that the three language components are very important for one's communicating his ideas in a language. Of course, for the best use of the language, one should master the three components.

In relation to the English language teaching in our schools, from the junior high schools to the senior high schools, and even to the universities, therefore, the three components must get serious attention in order that the students become (very) good language users.

As a matter of fact, very many students of junior and senior high schools, even in the universities are still lack of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Very many of them cannot use the language fluently because of the insufficient mastery of the language components.

For this reason, a teacher of English in those levels education, especially at the junior high schools and senior high schools should make use of his teaching process to develop the three language components : vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. One of the ways that can be used for this purpose is to make use of the teachers' questions in teaching-learning process. The teachers' questions have some characteristics that can help students learn and develop their mastery of the language components as discussed in the "Discussion" of this paper.

## 2. DISCUSSION

### A. Teachers' questions

A question is simply any statement which requires an answer from a person being asked. The question has an interrogative function. In a classroom setting, teachers' questions are defined as instructional cues or stimuli that convey to students the content to be learned and direction for what they are to do and how they are to do it. (Cotton, 2003 in Novriyana, 2015).

Furthermore, Novriyana (2015) quoting some experts describes the teachers' questions as follows :

Teachers' questions are all types and structures of utterances classified, either syntactically or functionally, as questions by a teacher before, during and after a teaching in order to elicit responses from the students (Tsui, 1992). Teachers' questions are also defined as a semantic class used to seek information on a specific subject (Quirk et al in Shoomoossi, 2004)

From the explanation above, it can be summarized that teachers' questions can be defined as any statement which has an interrogative function to elicit responses from the students.

### B. The purposes of teachers' questions.

The teachers' questions have some purposes in the teaching-learning process in the classroom. The teachers use this kind of question to see if the learners have acquired the imparted knowledge; to stimulate logical, reflective or imaginative thinking of issues being discussed ; to direct attention to and keep the students involved in the lessons ; to give space and participation (Saun, 2010)

From the explanation about purposes of the teachers' question above, it is easily understood that the teachers' questions are very important to apply in the classroom. Teachers' questions can be used to see whether the students have acquired the knowledge and how much and how well they have understood the knowledge ( the lesson, of course) being taught. The teachers' questions also encourage the students to use –even- to increase their logical, reflective or imainative thinking. Another benefit of using the teachers' questions in the classroom that they can direct the students' attention and keep the students involved in the teaching-learning process. It is clearly believed that attention and involvement of the students are very important to make them perform better in the lesson as Krashen (1982) says that students with high attention perform better.

The teachers' questions also provide space for the students for self-expression and increase motivation and participation. These help students to succeed in their learning. Krashen (1982) also adds that students with high motivation perform better.

### C. Functions of teachers questions

It is understood from Part B above that the teachers' questions have several purposes. Those purposes actually reflect that they have functions in the classroom, in the teaching-learning process. Novriyana (2015) summarizes the functions of the teachers' questions into 9 general groups, as follows :

*First*, the quality and the quantity of questions affect the quantity and quality of students' interaction in the lesson.

*Second*, the question is considered helpful in scaffolding students' participation in the classroom interaction and, furthermore, in language acquisition.

*Third*, the teachers' questions can arouse students' interests and curiosity

concerning a topic, to focus on particular issue or concept, to develop an active approach to learning, to stimulate students to ask questions of themselves and others

*Fourth*, the teachers' questions have the ability to grab the students' attention.

Fifth, the teachers' questions can be used to check the students' understanding, to elicit information and to control their classroom.

*Sixth*, the teachers' questions can be used to find out what students do or do not know and understand, to challenge or stimulate their thinking.

*Seventh*, the teachers' questions can function as a controller in the classroom, namely to control the classroom behaviour.

*Eighth*, the teachers' questions can function to keep the students involve themselves during the lessons so that they can express their ideas and thoughts and to help teachers evaluate their students' learning and revise the lesson if necessary.

*Ninth*, the teachers' questions can help their students focus their attention, exercise disciplinary control in the course or instruction, and encourage students' participation and move the lesson forward.

Table 1 below represents as the summary of the explanation above:

Table 1. Functions of teachers questions

For students	For teacher
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The quantity and quality of question affect the quantity and quality of students' interaction in the lesson.</li> <li>2. The questions will determine the students' responses.</li> <li>3. The teachers' questions are helpful in scaffolding students' participation in the classroom interaction.</li> <li>4. The teacher's questions are helpful in students' language acquisition.</li> <li>5. The teachers' questions can arouse the students' interest and curiosity concerning a topic.</li> <li>6. The teachers' questions can focus students' attention on a particular issue or concept.</li> <li>7. The teachers' questions can develop an active approach in learning.</li> <li>8. The teachers' questions can stimulate students to ask questions of themselves and others.</li> <li>9. The teachers' questions can make the students motivated to involve and participate more in the classroom interaction by answering the teacher's questions.</li> <li>10. The teachers' questions can challenge and stimulate their thinking.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The teachers' questions can be used to measure the students' understanding.</li> <li>2. The teachers' questions can be used to elicit information.</li> <li>3. The teachers' questions can be used to control the classrooms.</li> <li>4. The teachers' questions can be used to find out what students do or do not know and understand.</li> <li>5. The teachers' questions can help can help teachers evaluate their students' learning and revise the lesson when necessary.</li> <li>6. The teachers' questions can help teachers in exercising disciplinary control in the course or instruction.</li> <li>7. The teachers' questions can help teachers in encouraging students's participation and moving the lesson forward.</li> </ol>

From this table, we understand clearly that the teachers' questions can give a lot of benefits for the students in their learning, especially, in learning a language.

#### **D. Levels and forms of the questions**

Barret, Nuttal, Park as quoted by Fajri (2015) classify the question levels as seen in table 2 below:

Table 2 Levels and Forms of Questions

Barret	Christine Nuttal	Day and Park
1.Literal, Recognition or Recall	1.Literal comprehension	1.Literal comprehension
2.Reorganization	2.Reorganization	2.Reorganization
3.Inference	3.Inference	3.Inference
4.Evaluation	4.Evaluation	4.Evaluation
5.Appreciation	5.Appreciation	5.Appreciation
		6.Personal response

*Literal* questions refer to an understanding of the simple meaning of the text such as facts, vocabulary, etc. These questions can be answered directly and explicitly from the text. *Reorganization* requires students to obtain information from various parts of the text and combine it for additional understanding. In *inference* questions students combine their literal understanding with their own knowledge and intuitions. *Prediction* involves students to make a prediction about what might happen next by their understanding and their own knowledge of the topic. *Evaluation* questions requires students to give a comprehensive judgement about a certain aspect of the text. *Personal response* level question requires an answer or a response depending on the students feeling about the topic. *Appreciation* deals with the psychological and aesthetic impact of the selection on the students.

About the forms of the questions, Day and Park (Fajri, 2015) classify comprehension questions in to five forms, namely *yes/no*, *alternative*, *true/false*, *wh* and *multiple choice*.

#### E. Language Inputs

According to Cahyono (2013), input refers to the material that composes something. So, language input can be defined as the language material that composes students' repertoire. By using the language input, students can interact and communicate in that language. It is understood from Norman et al (1986) that the language inputs are vocabulary, structure (grammar), and pronunciation. The mastery of these language inputs will determine the development of students' language.

The problem is that it is not easy for the students to develop their own language because – especially for students in Indonesia – they do not have any environment to use the language except at their schools. Unfortunately, the schools still do not provide enough opportunities for optimizing the language inputs due to the very limited time offered in the curriculum. Another possible reason is that teachers of English do not make use of the teaching time for the increase of students' language inputs maximally, such as asking questions about vocabulary, structure/grammar and pronunciation during their teaching. There are slots, actually, that can be used by the teachers to help students develop their language inputs while taching any language skill.

The language inputs taught to the students must have the characteristics: comprehensible, interesting, and / or relevant, not grammatically sequenced and sufficient in quantity (Krashen, 1982).

Cahyono (2003) suggests that to provide the comprehensible, interesting, and / or relevant, and sufficient inputs the teachers can do intensive interaction as he did an experiment to her daughter who was four years old. The experiment was done in one year. Ater the experiment he found that the daughter could speak fluently and developed a lot of English vocabulary.

In developing the language inputs, Krashen (2013) suggests this formula :  $i+1$ . "  $i$  " represents the last rule we have acquired, our knowledge of the world, and context. In other words, " $i$ " can also be understood as the position where the students are in his language mastery. Whereas "  $i+1$  " can be defined as a symbolic place the teachers wants to bring his students. To develop the students' language inputs the teacher has to constantly push them forward. In the classroom setting the input development can be carried out in three forms; in the whole class, in pairs or small groups and working individually ( Norman, et.al, 1986).

To summarize, the language inputs can be defined as the language materials that compose the students' repertoire which are in the forms of pronunciation, struture/grammar and vocabulary.

In the teaching – learning process, the language inputs cannot be easily developed due to the following reasons:

1. The unavailability of English speaking environment to support.

2. The schools do not provide enough opportunities for optimizing the language inputs due to the limited time available.
3. The teachers of English do not make use of the teaching time to increase the students' language inputs maximally.

The language inputs provided to the students must be comprehensible, interesting and / or relevant, not grammatically sequence, and sufficient in quantity.

#### **F. How to implement the teachers' questions to develop students language inputs**

As mentioned previously, the language inputs meant in this paper are structure (grammar), vocabulary, and pronunciation. These three language components must be mastered by the students in order to master the language (in this paper : English). To master a language means to be able to use these components to communicate, namely to use them in listening, speaking, reading and writing appropriately.

In relation to the communicative language teaching, mastering the four language skills is very important. It is clear that in order to be able to listen, speak, write and read, the students must be good enough at the three language components. Unfortunately, as mentioned previously in this paper, very many students at junior and senior high schools and universities are not good enough at mastering them. Actually, the teachers of English of the school levels can help the students develop the knowledge about vocabulary, structure (grammar), and pronunciation by familiarizing and maximizing themselves to asking questions about the components of the language in any teaching they do. They can make themselves be accustomed to asking questions about the vocabulary, structure (grammar) and pronunciation during the teaching-learning process. They have to make themselves in the habit of asking questions to help the students know and remember the vocabulary, structure (grammar) and pronunciation. To do so, it is also suggested that the teachers visualize the points they are asking about by writing them on the board and ask the students about the meaning and the pronunciation of the words. For the grammar, they should and make sure that the students understand it without giving lengthy explanation.

### **3. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

From the explanation above, it is understood that to be able to use a language, a person must have a good mastery of the English language components, namely vocabulary, structure (grammar) and pronunciation. Unfortunately, it is not easy for Indonesian students to master them causing them unable to use the language appropriately, especially our junior and senior high school students. This "failure" is caused by some causes: the unavailability of English speaking environment to support, the schools do not provide enough opportunities for optimizing the language inputs due to the limited time available and the teachers of English do not make use of the teaching time to increase the students' language inputs maximally. Therefore, it is suggested that the teachers of English of our schools make themselves be accustomed to asking questions during their teaching process.

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