

Negotiation of Meaning of Indonesian EFL Learners in Casual Conversation: An SFL Study

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Abstract: Communicative interaction is demanded by all levels of EFL learners. To prepare them to comply with this purpose, engaging them to deal with the real-life conversation using the target language may have beneficial effects on their second language acquisition process. However, the way learners negotiating meaning in an understandable way and how they position themselves as the appropriate role of the speakers are still rarely studied, especially in the Indonesian teaching and learning context. This study aims to reveal what type of commodity is being exchanged by graduate learners (3 females and 1 male) when they are assigned to have an unplanned casual conversation. The study further analyzes the nature of the exchange structure of EFL learners' casual conversation seen from the Systemic Functional Linguistics perspective. The data were taken from audio recordings of casual conversations and then transcribed as the written data. The conversation was then divided into clauses as the unit of analysis. In employing a spoken discourse analysis framework, interactive analysis was implemented to discover exchange structure. The results show the exchanged commodity is information through statements. It indicates that as magister students, they always show their knowledge off, and intimacy sometimes matters as the reason for informative conversations. The speakers' role also has been successfully achieved by the speakers since their ability to position themselves as initiators or responders to keep the conversational flow.

INTRODUCTION

How EFL learners deliver their intended messages and comprehend the message itself from others, have been a concern in the study of interaction in second language acquisition. It arises a curiosity of how EFL learners grapple with interaction by using the target language in real life. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) argue that language is used to interact among people by exchanging information about what they intend to. Therefore, in attaining reciprocal interaction, EFL speakers need to transmit meaningful information. This kind of

exchanging meaningful information between interactants is called the negotiation of meaning.

Negotiation of meaning is defined as “the joint efforts that interlocutors make in oral and written interaction to deal with problems or message comprehensibility” (Pica, 1994, p. 429). Schaap et al. (2017) postulate negotiation of meaning as a collective process conducted by students in the construction of meanings through interaction with others. In this study, negotiation of meaning in conversation is defined as activities performed by the addresser and addressee to be understood by their interlocutors. They cooperatively work to provide comprehensible input and solve the misunderstanding that occurs and potential to occur. Therefore, it becomes crucial for EFL learners to negotiate meaning successfully.

Several global south researchers have conducted studies related to the negotiation of meaning. Wang (2019) conducts a study on the negotiation of meaning in creative tasks for Taiwanese university students. The findings reveal that natural conversation tasks promote challenging students and elicit students’ creative thinking to use negotiation strategies. It is in line with Dobao and Martínez (2007), who have investigated negotiating meaning in the interaction between English and Spanish speakers. The study suggests EFL university learners still have problems in communication with English. Negotiation of meaning, e.g., initiating a turn, is used to overcome some unworking communications strategies among the interactions.

Yuliati (2013) analyzes the role relationship in teacher-student classroom interaction and how the teacher negotiates interpersonal meaning to the students. By using analysis of mood suggested by Eggins and Slade (1997), this study reveals that the dominant utterances produced by the teacher are commanded in which showing the authority of the teacher in the classroom. Further, in order to interact with the students interpersonally, the teacher employs different types of speech roles, namely offer, statement, command, and question. In the same vein, Yang (2021) has investigated interpersonal choices in the negotiation of meaning in lecturer-students interaction of EFL college classes. Anchored in systemic functional linguistics, the study reported the massive uses of subject person and modal deixis to loosen interaction tension.

Encouraged by the previous studies, it is intriguing to emerge deeper analysis of EFL learners’ interaction especially adult and advanced learners cooperatively. Therefore, the study aims to explore how EFL learners negotiate meaning among themselves in a casual conversation context by using the target language. Unlike the previous studies, the

fundamental theory of speech roles in this study is derived from the combination of Thornbury and Slade (2007) and Martin and Rose (2007) classification. The aim of the study is to analyze the use of the concept of speech function to describe the commodity being exchanged in adjacency pair structure and roles of the speaker of the dialogue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretically, most adult or advanced EFL learners already know how to use adequate English appropriately in written form. However, it raises a problematic phenomenon: spoken form is always the weakness of EFL learners. In other words, fact shows that theoretical knowledge does not necessarily determine satisfying practice in real life. Since the aim of English teaching and learning is communicative purposes, learners are expected to generate understandable output when they engage in conversation with others.

A conversation eventually unfolds dynamically as it has ample researchable aspects. One of the commonest interests for spoken discourse analysis is how to describe patterns in the interactivity of conversation. Several scholars from the linguistics approach (Birmingham school and Systemic Functional Linguistics) have seen patterns in conversation functionally, that is, by revealing what function each speaker's move achieves in that context (Thornbury & Slade, 2007).

Furthermore, analyzing a speaker's move necessarily deals with MOOD structures (Martin, 1992; Martin & Rose, 2007). The MOOD in the principle of the grammatical system (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) contributes to exchanging commodities as the way to express a speaker's intended message. The possible commodity types being exchanged between the interactants are information and goods and services. The interactants then determine themselves to choose speech roles in interaction, whether to be initiators or responders in an exchange.

Moreover, Martin and Rose (2007) add that besides what the speaker is negotiating (information and goods and services), other basic parameters in the negotiation of meaning are complementary of initiating and responding moves (adjacency pair); and whether a move initiates the exchange or responds. By considering these parameters, they give rise to speech acts forming the heart of the semantic discourse system, referred to as speech function. The list is as follows:

Table 1. Basic speech function

Giving information	Statement - They took my camera	Acknowledgment - Did they?
Demanding information	Question - Everything OK?	Answer - Yes
Giving goods and services	Offer - Some coffee, brother?	Acceptance - Yes, please
Demanding goods and services	Command - Hurry	Compliance - OK

Martin and Rose (2007) give additional moves concerning greetings and calls. The former is to cover greeting and leave-taking, and the act of responding to this move is called a response to the greeting move. The latter is to get people's attention called as call, and the responding move is called a response to call. Moreover, they also add exclamation moves functioning as emotional responses to speech acts of other kinds. This move is not really negotiable since people scarcely respond to this move.

Each basic speech function (statement, question, offer, and command) has not only expected responses but also discretionary alternatives. Not all of the speech functions are accepted by the responders so that they are possible, for example, rejecting an offer, contradicting a statement, and so on. This situation is mostly found in casual conversation because of the social role of the conversation itself. Interactants have the right to express their ideas about affirming the similarities or explore the differences (Thornbury & Slade, 2007). Due to the frequency of discretionary in spoken English, Martin (1992) and Eggins and Slade (1997) propose dependent moves to extend the discretionary moves that can occur, namely *tracking* and *challenging* (Martin, 1992; Martin & Rose, 2007; Eggins & Slade, 1997). A tracking move is to monitor, check or clarify the content of prior moves. The response of this move is called a response to tracking. Moreover, a challenging move is to resist in some way because the interactants are not happy about the way they are being positioned in an exchange. This move may be defined as an unexpected response given by the interlocutors.

Grounded on several classifications and types of speech functions described before (Martin, 1992; Eggins & Slade, 1997; Martin & Rose, 2007; Thornbury & Slade, 2007; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), this study exemplifies the types of moves that can occur in English conversation used as fundamental categorization in analyzing the data in this study. The categorization is in table 2 as follows:

Table 2. Combination of typology of speech functions

Type of Moves	Speech Function	Code
Initiating moves (I)	Statement	I:S
	Question	I:Q
	Offer	I:O
	Command	I:C
	Rhetorical question	Q:R
	Call	Call
	Greeting	Gr
	Exclamation	Excl
Responding moves (R)	Acknowledge statement	R:S
	Response statement to question	R:Q
	Response acknowledge offer	R:O
	Response to command	R:C
	Response to call	rCall
	Response to greeting	rGr
	Response to exclamation	rExcl
Discretionary moves	tracking (confirming, checking, and clarifying)	Tr
	response to tracking	rTr
	challenging (disengaging, challenging, countering)	Ch
	response to challenge	rCh

METHODOLOGY

To comply with the purpose of the research, this study employs a qualitative approach by implementing spoken discourse analysis. There are several perspectives in analyzing spoken discourse (Schriffin, 1994; Eggin & Slade, 1997; Thornbury & Slade, 2007). Since the aim of the study is to analyze the conversation to shed light on the nature of language itself, Systemic Functional Linguistics (linguistic approach) conceptual framework is applied as the tool to analyze the data. The use of the SFL concept is to unfold conversational exchanges by making functional interpretations of interaction to briefly examine what function each speaker's move achieves in the dialogue. Thus, the unit of analysis in this study is move. Further, move is analyzed through MOOD systems (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) in order to analyze the concept of speech function in the structure of a conversation. As the categorization of the moves and the speech functions, this study applies a combination of typology of speech functions as stated in table 2.

The subject of the study was four advanced EFL learners taking magister program of English education in one of the universities in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. The participants were three females and one male who were asked to interact in a group. They have already informed in advance that their conversation would be recorded and used as data

for the research. Consequently, this situation somewhat lessened the naturalness of the expressions used in the conversation.

The object of the study is EFL learners' verbal interaction in the form of spoken text data. To collect the data, the study used a mobile phone for audio recording. The participants were then assigned to interact with each other by using the target language for 15 minutes. To create as authentic a real-life conversation as possible, the topics of the conversation are not predetermined by the researcher.

To commence the analysis, the data were transcribed thoroughly and then analyzed using an interactive model of data analysis proposed by Denzin and Lincoln (1998). The research encompassed data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved coding to signify the data essential and relevant to the study under investigation. Data display was to present the coded data comprehensively, e.g., in tables of categorization. Conclusion drawing/verification was to verify all the displayed data of each source with each other in order to interpret and generate findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Move and Turns Pattern

To commence the analysis of the structure of interactivity conversation, the move pattern needs to be primarily considered since it is a unit of study. The number of turns in interaction taken by participants is crucial as well. Both the number of move and turn distributions demonstrate the pattern of the commodity being exchanged in the conversation. The detailed number of moves produced by each participant can be seen in detail in table 3 below.

Table 3. The distribution move and turn of each interactant

Participants	Number of Turn	Number of Move
L (Female)	65	67
D (Female)	70	74
C (Female)	69	75
F (Male)	66	69
Total	277	292

The table distribution above indicates that every participant almost has an equal right to have a turn in the conversation. No one dominates the floor. The number of moves also implies that each participant contributes in making reciprocal interactions. This situation

indicates equal power between participants in which they are not superior or inferior speakers. Everyone has the right to express their own ideas, and everyone is also expected to respect others' floor to speak up. Egging and Slade (1997) state that casual conversation sometimes shows solidarity of each interactant and all participants are assumed to have good social relationships toward each other.

Speech Function Analysis

The role of the speakers and the commodity being exchanged in the interaction may be established through speech functions (Martin & Rose, 2007). Thus, to comply with the study's purpose, each interactant's speech function needs to be analyzed. The detailed types of moves in conversation are provided in table 4 below.

Table 4. Speech functions performed in the conversation

Type of Moves	Speech Function	L Speaker	D Speaker	C Speaker	F Speaker	The Total Number of Evidence
Initiating moves	Call	1	-	-	-	1
	I:Q	6	7	5	6	24
	I:S	13	4	20	19	56
	I:O	1	-	1	-	2
	I:C	-	-	1	-	1
	Excl	-	-	2	1	3
Responding moves	rCall	-	1	-	-	1
	R:Q	7	4	5	5	21
	R:S	17	24	19	19	79
	R:C	-	-	-	1	1
	rExcl	-	1	-	1	1
Discretionary moves	Tr	11	23	8	10	52
	rTr	13	5	10	7	35
	Ch	1	2	2	1	6
	rCh	-	1	1	1	3

Commodity in the Conversation

The result of the classification indicates that information is the dominant commodity being exchanged in the interaction. A large number of questions and statements produced by the speakers as initiating moves is the concrete evidence. Further, the responding moves support by showing that responses are also about exchanging information in the form of responding statements to questions and acknowledging statements. This fact implies the interaction is about exchanging knowledge rather than action. Thornbury and Slade (2007)

classify this situation into an interactional or interpersonal exchange in which the moves are mostly about interpersonal negotiation rather than a transactional one.

Furthermore, information exchanged in the interaction is mostly meaningful and understandable. All of the questions initiated by the speakers are mainly answered in the form of statements. Though several tracking moves are inserted between the exchange structures, the intended meaning is generally negotiated cooperatively. The evidence can be seen in an excerpt of the conversation below:

256	F	I:Q	What kind of transportation provided there?
257	L	Tr	What's that? What we call <i>angkot</i> in English?
258	C	rTr	You can call it <i>angkot</i> .
259	F	rTr	public transportation
260	C	rTr	Yeah public transportation. Minibus.
261	L	R:Q	Yes, minibus.

In achieving the expected response from an interlocutor, tracking moves are established. This situation naturally occurs in casual conversation that close friend relationship frequently probes difference as much as confirms similarities (Thornbury & Slade, 2007). In other words, in an authentic environment of casual conversation, questions are not always directly answered, but sometimes they may be preceded by potential moves. In this case, EFL learners have jointly constructed meaningful interaction by exchanging understandable and negotiable messages.

Another supporting evidence regarding meaningful and understandable exchange is from statements uttered by the speakers as initiating moves. One of the pieces of evidence is provided in a short excerpt as follows:

78	F	I:S	And we need to spend our night there Drinking what? Argh... what's that? What is that? Charcoal coffee? You know?
79	L	Tr	Ginger?
80	C	Tr	Ginger?
81	D	Tr	Huh??? Charcoal coffee? What is that?
82	F	rTr	<i>kopi arang</i>
83	D	R:S	oh (laughs)
84	C	R:S	I know I know that

The F speaker intends to talk about the name of a beverage by using initiating move through a statement. The response from other speakers is not immediately achieved since the core message in the move is not clear enough. Thus the next move of the other speaker is a tracking move to clarify what the speaker really means to be. All of the interlocutors seem to be confused about what *Charcoal coffee* is. To avoid communication breakdown, the speaker then employs code-switching by using L1. By doing this, the intended message is negotiable.

To sum up, as supported by the data analysis result of speech functions performed by speakers, the frequent commodity being exchanged is information. It consequently emerges the casual conversation constructed by the EFL learners--a verbal exchange in which they just interact in the conversation to tell something or express their ideas.

Role of the Speakers

As proposed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the basic speech roles in interacting are initiator or responder. Further, when engaging in interaction, the interactants exchange for giving means inviting others to receive, and demand means asking others to give. Based on the result of the analysis, on the one hand, 87 times initiating moves of 292 moves or 30% of moves position the speakers as initiators. On the other hand, 107 response moves or 37% of the whole moves place the speakers as responders. The rest of the moves are discretionary moves which take 33% of the entire moves. These number distributions show the naturalness of the casual conversation that there is no domination of a particular move.

The other consideration of the role of speakers is the type of moves produced by the entire speakers. In initiating the negotiation, all of the participants fairly enough ask questions as a way to elicit other's responses. Unlike initiating through questions, speakers C and F dominate starting moves through statements. C mostly expresses her feelings or interpersonal negotiation, while F frequently talks about facts or logico-semantic negotiation.

21	F	I:S	Yeah, you know Citra buy, bought (<i>Laugh</i>)== several new stuffs
111	F	I:S	ohh talking about angkringan I know one a... it is called as a... <i>petruk and gareng</i> .
125	F	I:S	== It's very ==far from the venue

25	C	I:S	yeah, (you see) it's a little bit hard for me to ...
26		Tr	what is it? To umm == to (save) my money when I see a good stuff.
27		I:S	It's like I have a desire always to buy that stuff.
49	C	I:S	Yeah, many things (very) need money, lho? (laughs)
66	C	I:S	So, if there is somebody, what is it, ask me to join them to go to Malioboro, I will REJECT

Fortunately, through their initiating statements, responses of other speakers are mainly stimulated to create cooperative meaning negotiation. Both feelings and facts are negotiable among them, and it also heightens the assumption that they have a well-being social relationship.

Moreover, in responding to the other's initiating moves, speaker D favors acknowledging statements more often. Though she only has a small number of initiating moves, she is active in giving support and showing attention replies. The part of excerpt evidence is provided below:

15	D	R:S	Uh um, I actually have run out of money == I'm broke, I'm broke
29	D	R:S	That's woman
35	D	R:S	mine too

It is also supported by the fact that she produces the most tracking moves to clarify, check, and confirm the preceding move. To give a relevant response, sometimes the speakers use tracking moves. It can be seen in several pieces of evidence of move below:

68	D	Tr	==really?
81	D	Tr	huh??? Charcoal coffee? what is that?
106	D	Tr	<i>ruminten?</i>

Instead of providing the expected response, the interactants may confront prior moves, for instance, by actively rejecting or disengaging negotiation. This discretionary move sometimes occurs when the speakers feel discomfort to affirm the prior speech function performed by the prior speakers. In the part of the excerpt below, speaker C avoids replying to L's checking move. It seems the move is to probe deep into speaker C's private life. Thus,

instead of responding to tracking moves, she replies with vague answers in the form of questions. The eagerness of speaker L about C's wedding by stating checking information move briefly indicates no boundary or close friendship among them. Although sometimes saving others' faces is still crucial, sometimes face-threatening acts may occur when chatting with close friends.

277	L	I:S	Bur first. I will go to Citra's wedding.
278	D	R:S	Yes, of course we are going to...
279	L	Tr	And when?
280	C	Ch	Why you guys talking about my wedding?

Regarding the role of speakers in the conversation, all participants show equal rights whether to be initiator or responder. They generally gain mutual understanding due to their ability to construct the interaction jointly. Each speaker has mainly accomplished the speech role as an initiator since their move opens the exchange. It also occurs when being a responder. The responses let them engage in an interactive talk to create smooth negotiation of meaning in the conversation. Further, expected responses support the speaker's proposition and suggest participants' alignments and solidarity (Thornbury & Slade, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Involving EFL students who deal with the real-life conversation using the target language may have beneficial effects on their second language acquisition process. When they grapple with negotiating meaning in real-life conversation, it becomes an intriguing study area for spoken discourse analysis to know in-depth about exchange structure in the EFL context. The study brings to light the functional interpretation of casual conversation constructed by EFL learners. Grounded on the Systemic Functional Linguistics conceptual framework, how moves function to negotiate meaning is the core of the study.

The results of the analysis suggest that the moves produced by the speakers are equally distributed. Moreover, in terms of something being exchanged in the interaction, information dominates the commodity exchange. This exchange structure is cauterized as interpersonal or interactional exchange. It is related to the participants' social well-being, signals friendship, and strengthens the bonds within social groups. This kind of interaction aims not to achieve practical goals but rather to maintain social relationships among the interactants. In other

words, all speakers actively and freely contribute to the interactive exchanges by telling their ideas and opinions.

Another result is regarding the speech role produced by the speakers to analyze the accomplishment of meaning negotiating. The speech function analysis shows initiating statement and responding statement are the most in the conversation. The result suggests that the speakers have already understood their position in the interaction, whether to initiate or respond. It indicates that the learners, as they are holding a magister degree, have already had enough linguistic knowledge to negotiate meaning in a conversation. By doing this, interactive talk can be achieved, and the intended meaning can be successfully negotiated among the participants. Further, producing moves as negotiable as possible is why generally the exchange runs smoothly.

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