

Group Discussion: To What Extent Does It Promote Vocabulary Uptake

Abdullah Mohd Nawi & Ammani A/P Jeya Pirathaba
Faculty Of Education
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to investigate to what extent vocabulary uptake occurs in a group discussion. The subjects in this study are six interlocutors who are from faculty of education. The methodology used in this study is recording and taking field notes of the group discussion. The data in this study have been analysed based on Lyster and Ranta (1997) Error Correction Model. The findings of this study illustrate that vocabulary uptake does occur in group discussion. Besides that, vocabulary uptake occurs most from the noun word class. Meanwhile the most frequent interactional pattern which promotes uptake in a group discussion is recast. Through this study, it could be concluded that group discussion does allow vocabulary uptake to occur and it should be conducted more often among low proficiency students.

Abstrak: Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji sejauh mana pelajar mempelajari perkataan daripada perbincangan. Dalam kajian ini, sample responden adalah enam pelajar daripada fakulti pendidikan. Metodologi yang digunakan dalam kajian ini adalah merekod perbualan serta pengambilan nota dari jarak jauh. Data yang diperolehi telah dikaji dan dianalisis menggunakan rangka Lyster and Ranta (1997). Keputusan kajian ini membuktikan bahawa pelajar telah mempelajari beberapa perkataan. Selain itu, dapatan kajian ini membuktikan bahawa 'noun class' merupakan perkataan yang paling banyak dipelajari. Manakala, 'recast' merupakan gaya perbualan yang terbanyak yang menyebabkan perkataan dipelajari. Kesimpulannya, kerja kumpulan perlu dijalankan dengan lebih intensif terutamanya diantara pelajar yang lemah kerana ia membolehkan mereka mempelajari pelbagai perkataan.

Keywords: group discussion, vocabulary

Introduction

Statement of Problem

As what has been stated in the background of the problem the capability to speak and use English is one of the most important things that job employers are looking for in an employee. Unfortunately, many undergraduates especially Malay undergraduates from local university are not proficient in English language. (Rosmah Mohd Dain, 2002, July 8). The Higher Education Ministry has carried out a study to gauge the level of English proficiency among students of local universities. Higher Education Minister Datuk Mustapa Mohamed said preliminary findings revealed that the level of proficiency of about 29 per cent of the 132,000 university students was either at "Level One or Level Two" — the lowest in the Malaysian University English Test (Muet). About 43 per cent is at Level Three (average), 21 per cent at Level Four (satisfactory), 5 per cent at Level Five (good) and the remaining 2 per cent is at Level Six, which is excellent. (Hamidah Atan, 2007, January 23)

In order to curb this problem several universities such as Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) have taken the initiative to conduct extra English Language classes for students. UTM has also formed an English Language unit, headed by a director. This unit serves as a support system in promoting English in UTM through teaching and learning processes. One of its programme is called 'Friends of English'. This programme serves to provide an environment for the students to practice English language. It is a small group discussion which is led by an expert in English language (appendix A). However, there are

curiosities whether this programme would allow the uptake of vocabulary. According to Thornbury (2002) the reason why the learners are not proficient in English mainly in speaking because they have limited vocabulary of the particular language. He added that, without grammar very little could be conveyed however without vocabulary nothing is conveyed.

In juxtaposition to that, this research would be investigating whether small group discussion among low proficiency students in Malaysia would promote the uptake of vocabulary. If that is so, this research would also investigate the interactional features which promote the uptake of that vocabulary. Besides that, the most frequent category (part of speech) of vocabulary uptake among learners in a group discussion would also be investigated.

Research objectives

The research is done to;

- ✓ To explore to what extent vocabulary uptake occurs in a group discussion.
- ✓ To find out which vocabulary uptake the most.
- ✓ To investigate the interactional patterns which promotes the uptake of vocabulary.

Significance of the study

The main concern of this research is to find out to what extent does vocabulary uptake occurs in a small group discussion. By doing so we would find out whether the Friends of English Programme promotes vocabulary uptake. Other than that, this research would be a reference to other researchers who wish to investigate on vocabulary uptake in a group discussion as this area is still not explored.

Scope of the study

The study would be carried out on six subjects from the Faculty of Education .All these subjects are participants of Friends of English. The recording would be conducted when the programme Friends of English were being conducted. However only the first section of the programme which is group discussion would be analysed (refer appendix A). Due to time constrain, only two session would be recorded in completing this research.

Methodology

Selection of Subjects

The subjects are five first year faculty of education student and a final year teaching English as a second language student. All five students are faculty of education students are who are pursuing their education in Bachelor of Science and Education in living skills. These students are volunteers who have the same level of proficiency (MUET BAND 2).Meanwhile the final year student is an expert in English Language. This subject is from faculty of Education .She is pursuing her education in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL). The reason such grouping is based on Vygotsky's theory which, for cognitive development to occur, a child needs to interact with more able member.

Design of the study

1 Data collection method

In this study, I aimed to observe whether vocabulary uptake occurs in group discussion. I would also be looking at the interactional features which trigger the uptake of the vocabulary. Besides that, I would also find out which part of speech uptakes most in a group discussion. The following data collection methods would be employed in this study:

- Audio taping each session of the group discussion for two sessions.
- Non-participant observation by means of field notes by the researcher.

2 Data collection procedures

Data is collected from the group discussion which involves six subjects. The subjects discuss on one topic in one session. The subjects would discuss and determine the topics together with the expert at the beginning of the session. The expert also plays a role as a group leader. The reason of doing this is to reduce their anxiety. As Krashen (1985) states when affective filter is high acquisition would not take place. Then the topics would be arranged accordingly so that it is interrelated. When the topics are interrelated to each other, it would provide a platform for the subjects to re-use the vocabularies that have been uptake from the previous topic. This title of the discussion would be given by prior to the discussion allowing the subjects to prepare ideas or points before they discuss. Besides that, at the beginning of each session, subjects are reminded to ask question if they do not understand any particular thing. They are also reminded to participate 100 percent.

Other than that, in every session the group discussion is audio taped. The MP4 player would be managed by the subjects. I would not be involve in the group discussion. My presence during the entire group discussion is as a non-participant observer. I will be at a 'safe' distances from them or I will be acting to do some work but having indirect observation to the subjects so that I can take non verbal information of the discussion which has be carried out. Figure 3.1 provides information on the action plan of the research.

3 Data analysis method

In my study, I would be doing protocol analysis. I would transcribe each and every session of the group discussion. Then, I would analyse the transcription to find out whether vocabulary uptake occurs in a group discussion as well as the interactional patterns that promotes uptake of that vocabulary. I would also be investigating which type of vocabulary has been uptake the most.

Result

Research Question 1: To what extent does vocabulary uptake occur in a group discussion?

Dillon (1996) states that discussion is a form of group interaction where people talk back and forth with one another. In a group discussion, generally there would be four to five members joining together in addressing a question to common concern, exchanging and examining different views to form their answer, enhancing their knowledge or understanding, their appreciation or judgement, their decision, resolution or action over the matter at issue. Sahirah Marzuki et. al. (2006) states that normally in a group discussion there would be a leader who plays a role to overseas the running of the discussion. He/ She have to make sure that each member participates or contributes to the discussion because participation is

necessary to “meaningful” learning (Hill,1969) .The leader for the group discussion in my research is S1 who is the expert.

Table 1: Number of Vocabulary Uptake in the group discussion

Interlocutors	Uptake occurrences	Total
S1 (EXPERT)		0
S2	III	4
S3	IIII	6
S4	IIIIII	7
S5	I	1
S6	IIIIIIII	10

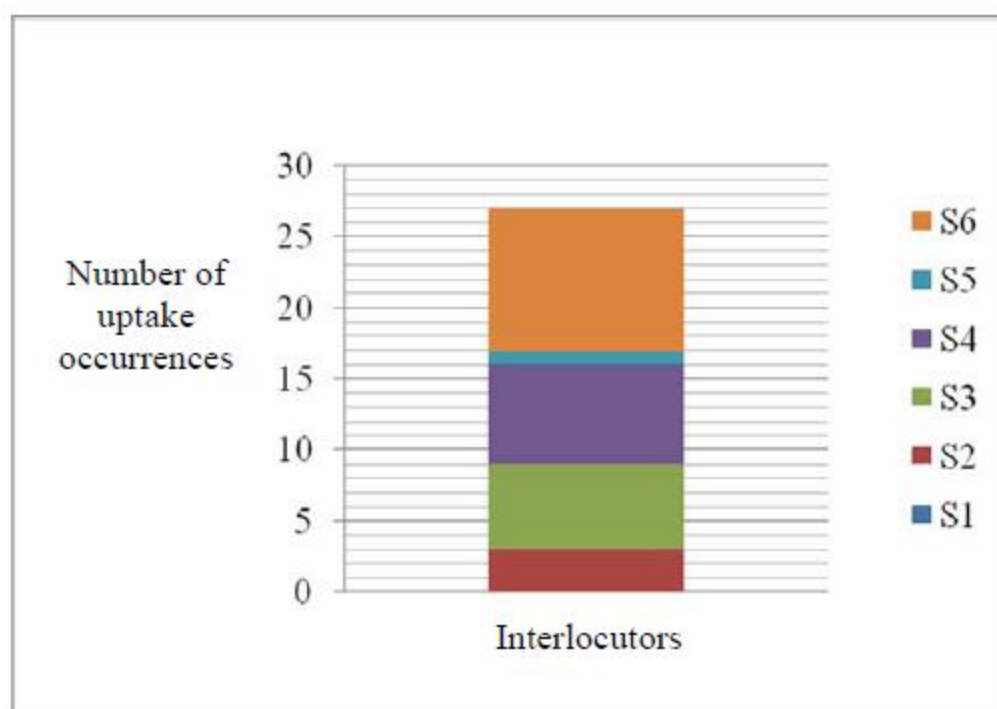


Figure 1: Number of Vocabulary Uptake in the group discussion

Table 1 and Figure 1 shows the number of vocabulary uptake occurred in the group discussion. Uptake has occurred as many as twenty-seven times. Vocabulary uptake occurred most on subject F with 10 vocabulary.

Research Question 2: Which Class of Vocabulary is Uptake the most.

Traditional grammar classifies words based on eight parts of speech: the verb, the noun, the pronoun, the adjective, the adverb, the preposition, the conjunction, and the interjection. Each part of speech explains not what the word is, but how the word is used. In fact, the same word can be a noun in one sentence and a verb or adjective in the next. In response to that, I have identified and placed the vocabulary based on its word class. The distribution is shown as below.

Table 2: Listing of the vocabularies according to the word class

Word class	Types of Vocabulary
Noun	cat fish, entrepreneur, puppy love, tailoring shop, oil, spark plug, educationist, live, faint, unconditional, valuable, complicated, cook.
Verb	pursue, bonded, expand, sew, not last, last, give birth, frustrated.
Adjectives	
Adverb	really.
Conjunction	but.
Interjection	
Preposition	
Pronoun	everyone.

Table 2 provides us the listing of types of vocabulary which has been uptake in the group discussion. Vocabulary ‘cat fish’, ‘entrepreneur’, ‘puppy love’, ‘tailoring shop’, ‘oil’, ‘spark plug’, ‘educationist’, ‘live’, ‘faint’, ‘unconditional’, ‘valuable’, ‘complicated’ and ‘cook’ has been listed in the noun class. Vocabulary ‘pursue’, ‘bonded’, ‘expand’, ‘sew’, ‘not last’, ‘last’, ‘give birth’ and ‘frustrated’ is listed in the verb class. Vocabulary ‘really’ has been listed in the word class adverb. Vocabulary ‘but’ is listed in word class conjunction. The vocabulary ‘everyone’ is listed in word class pronoun.

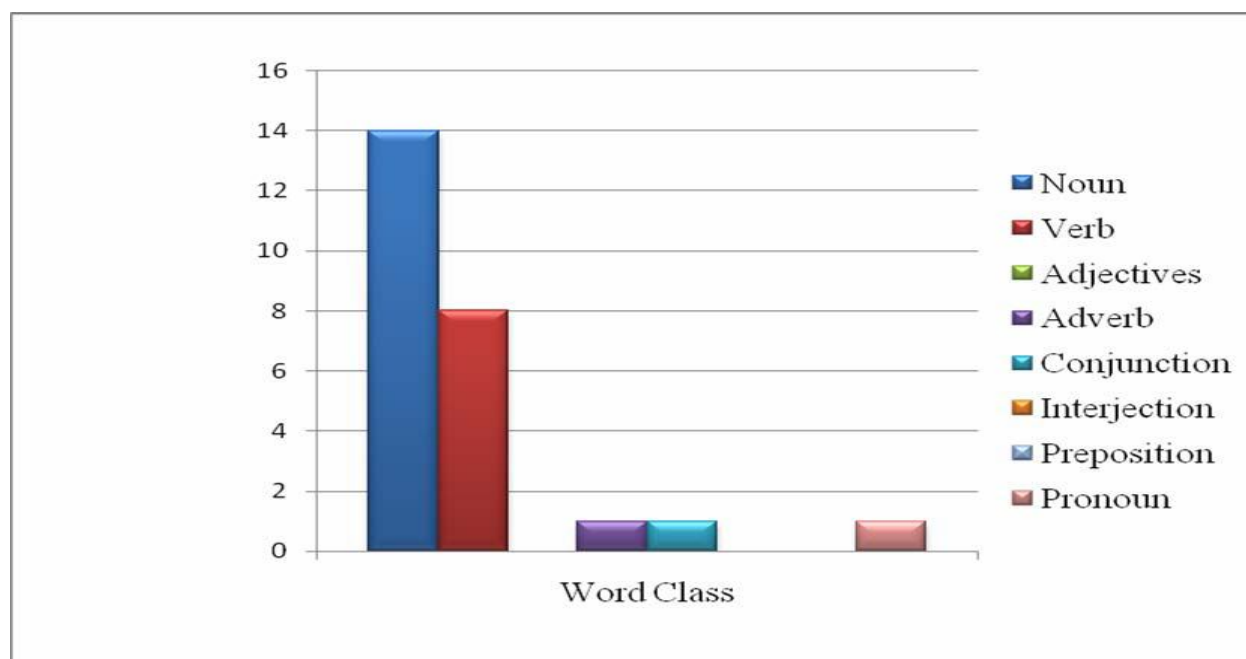


Figure 2: Occurrence of vocabulary uptake according to word class.

Figure 2 provides information on the number of uptake according to the eight traditional word classes which is noun, verb, adjectives, adverb, conjunction, interjection, preposition and pronoun. The vocabulary which derived from the word class noun occurs the most which is as many as fourteen times.

Next is followed by verb class with eight occurrences of uptake. One vocabulary has been uptake each from the, pronoun, adverb and conjunction class. There has not been vocabulary uptake for pronoun, preposition and interjection class.

Table 3: Number of occurrences of the types of interactional patterns which promotes uptake in the group discussion.

Table 3 provides information on the occurrences of the interactional pattern which promotes the vocabularies identified in research question one. Recast has occurred for twenty four times followed by translation request with four times. Vocabulary uptake did not occur with the interactional patterns such as explicit correction, metalinguistics feedback, elicitation and repetition.

Discussion for Research Question 1:

'ikan keli' to describe 'cat fish'. S5 has been corrected by her peer S4. Then she reproduced the word symbolizing intake has occurred.

Other than that, limitation on vocabulary items has resulted S2 to use gesture to describe her business in extract 4.27. S2 was describing how she wanted to expand her business. However she has ran out of vocabulary items. In response to that, she uses gesture to describe. Through that gesture, S1 provides S2 the appropriate vocabulary and S2 uses that vocabulary to construct the clause and continued her topic.

An interlocutor is observed of using Malay slang to describe something which she fails to know. This slang is only known among their peers. For example in extract 4.12, S4 used the word 'renyuh' to describe her emotion on sewing. This word does not exist in the dictionary however S6 knew what it meant and provided S4 the English word 'complicated'. S6 constructed a sentence using the word allowing uptake on S4 to occur.

Besides that, through my finding I have realised that the learners did not have the proper intake of some vocabulary throughout their life. In many occasions it is realised that the learners have used the wrong vocabulary to describe the context. For example is extract 4.18 where S3 has used the vocabulary 'monkey love' to describe her high school love. However the correct term is 'puppy love' which has been provided by S1. S3 giggles and reproduces the word.

Other than that, the lack of exposure in English language has caused the learner not to know the proper pronunciation of the vocabulary. In response to that, vocabulary which does not give meaning to the other interlocutors or the one which is confusing has been corrected. In addition to that, those words have been reproduced to prove that uptake has occurred. For example in extract 4.10, S1 pronounces pursue as 'peryou'. This situation has caused a chaos to the discussion. Other interlocutors were doubting what has been said by S1 especially S2 as response was directed to her. Then, others managed to guess her pronunciation using contextual clues. They corrected S6's pronunciation and S6 reproduces it allowing S2 to answer what S1 needed.

Discussion for Research Question 2:

Group discussion is a situation whereby the interlocutors join together in addressing a question to common concern, exchanging and examining different views to form their answers, enhancing their knowledge or understanding, their appreciation or judgment, their decision, resolution or action over the matter at issue. (Dillon, 1996) This situation indirectly means that the interlocutors would be focusing more on delivering the meaning to the other interlocutor. However during this situation, the interlocutors might have challenges in doing so because they are not proficient in the language. When the interlocutors struggling to understand they tend to be focus on the meaning as well as form (Gass and Varonis, 1994).

In response to that, the findings provides us information that vocabulary from the word class noun which has been uptake the most followed by vocabulary from the word class verb, adjective, adverb, conjunction and pronoun. The reason for word class noun is uptake the most is because nouns are the most important vocabulary in delivering message. (Ellis, 1999) This finding confirms the finding of the study by Ellis (1999).

Discussion for Research Question 3:

Recast seems to be the most common interactional pattern which promotes uptake in the group discussion. This result contradicts with the results found by Lyster and Ranta (1997) which states recast is rarely used in term of uptake. Most probably the reason of their findings is different from this research is because their study was conducted in L2 classroom learners of French. Meanwhile these findings are from

a small group discussion of L2 learners of English. The environment of learning second language is different as small group discussion provides an intimate and supportive environment to learn the language (Barnes,1973).

Apart from that, the goals of both the activity is different. In a classroom, the motive of the teacher is to teach the students however in this group discussion is to provide a platform for the students to have a conversation in English. This group discussion promotes learning through interaction which is naturally occurring conversation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether vocabulary uptake occurs in group discussion. There were six interlocutors involved in the discussion. One is an expert in English Language and the others are Bachelor of Education and Science in Living Skills students. This study is conducted for two week (2 sessions) which each lasted for approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

The finding of this study proves that vocabulary uptake does occur in group discussion. It is noticeable that students seek for clarification on vocabulary that they do not understand .Besides that, they also asks for translation request on vocabulary which is vague in the second language. Apart from that, they also use gestures to describe words that they do not know. In order to that, other interlocutors would provide the appropriate word. Other than that, the lack of exposure in English language has caused the learner not to know the proper pronunciation of the vocabulary. In response to that, vocabulary which does not give meaning to the other interlocutors or the one which is confusing has been corrected. In addition to that, those words have been reproduced to prove that uptake has occurred.

The findings also show that, uptake occurred most on the word class noun and followed by word class verb. Pronoun, conjunction, adjective and adverb class only has one occurrences of each uptake. The reason uptake of vocabulary has occurred most in noun class and followed by verb class is because noun and verbs are used to describe thing. Ellis (1999) states that noun is used to describe things more compared to verb.

The interactional pattern which promotes all these vocabulary is recast and translation request. Recast has occurred twenty three times and translation request has occurred four times. Recast occurred the most because Malaysian has values which would not make fun or explicitly correct others. Recast is a strategy which implicitly corrects the interlocutor which promotes to vocabulary uptake. Besides that, the result obtained from the research contradicts with the result obtained by Lyster and Ranta (1997). The reason so is because Lyster and Ranta's study was on L2 French learner and this research is on L2 English learner. Apart from that, the environment and the purpose of my research is different compared to Lyster and Ranta's research.

References

- Allwright, D. (1984) Why don't learners learn what teachers teach? The Interaction Hypothesis. In D. Singleton & D. Little (Eds.), *Language learning in formal and informal context* (pp. 3-18).Dublin: Irish Association for Applied Linguistics.
- Allen, P., Swain M.,Harley, B. & Cummins, J. (1990) Aspect of classroom treatment: Towards a more comprehensive view of second language education.In Harley , P. Allen , J.Cummins & M. Swain (Eds.) *The Development of Bilingual Proficiency* (pp. 57-81). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Asmah Haji Omar (Eds.)(1984) *Kaedah Pengajaran Bahasa*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa Pustaka.
- Balakrishnan Muthu (1997) Second Language Acquisition among Rural School Students. *Utusan Publication Distribution Sdn. Bhd.*
- Barnes ,D.(1973) *Language in the Classroom*, England: Open University Press.
- Bridges, D (1990) *Education, Democracy and Discussion*, Windson Berks: NFER Publication
- Bruton A. and Samada, V. (1980) Learner and Teacher roles in the treatment of oral error in group work. In *RELC Journal 11*(2):49-63
- Brown, G. & Yule, G. (1983) *Teaching the spoken language*. Cambridge :CUP
- Celik, M(2003) Teaching Vocabulary through Code Mixing, *ELT Journal 57.4*:361-369
- Danato (1994) Collective scaffolding in second language learning. In J.P.Lantolf & G. Appel (Eds.), *Vygotskian approaches to second language research*, Ablex: Norwood
- Dillon (1996) *Using Discussion in Classroom* ,Buckingham:Open University Press
- Doughty (1987) The impact of interaction in comprehension, *TESL Quarterly 21* : 737-758.
- Spada, N. & Frohlich, M. (1995) *COLT. Communicative Orientation of Language teaching observation: Coding conventions and applications*. Sydney,Australia: National Center for English Language Teaching and Research.
- Ellis,R. (1999) Factors in the Incidental acquisition of Second Language Vocabulary from Oral Input .In Kees de Bot & Thom Huebner (Eds.) *Learning a second Language through Interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamin Publication.
- Ellis,S., & Rogoff,B. (1986) Problem solving in children's management of instruction. In E.Mueller & C.Cooper (eds) , *Process and Outcome in peer relationships*, Orlando: Academic Press.