UNIVERSITY EFL STUDENTS' LANGUAGE PREFERENCES DURING ONLINE LEARNING CLASSES

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on investigating language preferences that English majors use the most when communicating orally with lecturers during the virtual meeting classroom and the reason why they are using the particular language. Language preference is an act that humans take to choose a language for communication. A qualitative approach was applied in this research. The data were collected through interview sessions via Zoom meeting and observation fieldnotes in online learning class. The participants were from English Department students in sixth semester who enrolled into the Seminar on Language class. To analyse the data, thematic analysis was used for this research. Thematic analysis is the way to analyze the data by dividing them into themes. The result shows that the interaction inside the class was dominantly done in English but students, in particular, preferred to use mixed English and Indonesian because they felt more comfortable to mix those languages. Furthermore, students' language preferences are affected by some factors, including politeness, language pride, also the dominant language used in one condition. It is important to conduct this research so that lecturers and students can adjust to the language preferences that make students easier to understand, and the learning process runs effectively.

KEYWORDS: language preferences, online learning, EFL students

INTRODUCTION

Online Learning is a technology-based education that transforms students' learning experiences. E on E-learning is not only electronic, but also experience, extended, and expended. This theory refers to more opportunities for students to learn, adjusted to the availability of time, place, and the necessity to use online learning methods. In online learning, students are asked to be involved and more active.

So, it is best to implement online learning to help students maximize the learning process. Students are allowed to talk, stating their opinion inside the online class, similar with the offline class as well. Online learning provides the learners with a conducive learning environment, especially for the oral communication inside the learning process.

Studies about language preferences have been done extensively. For instance, Haryanto et al. (2016) revealed that 57 college students were more excited using English inside the class, but the students still felt comfortable when they were using Bahasa. That is why, in order to contribute to this existing body of literature, this present study sought to explore about English majors students' language preferences inside the online class when they are communicating orally with lecturers and to find out the reason why they prefer using the particular language.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

E-LEARNING
E-Learning is a learning method that runs in online media through the internet. This method fixes the problem that created distance for students and teachers in the learning process. There are several characteristics of E-Learning. The first one is E-Learning using technology as the media for learning. Secondly, it is easier for the users to access the educational schedule, learning result, and everything that is related to the curriculum through the internet and computer. Thirdly, E-Learning provides conveniece for both students and teachers to access the learning materials everywhere and every time.

LANGUAGE PREFERENCES
From Chomsky (1957, p. 13) perception, "language is a collection of sentences that are arranged by the infinite elements". While language preference is an act that humans take to choose a language for communication; this happens because there are more than one languages that could be used in one environment (Fasold, 1984). The linguistic background of people will affect their preference for using particular language and it depends on the social context (Li, 1996).

There are several factors that caused language preferences, which are: the aim and function of interaction, environment, participants of interaction, and topics. Gal (1982) supports this theory of factors with his opinion that the characteristics of the speaker and the hearer contribute to language preferences while communicating in society. On the other hand, Rubin (1982) argued that his view that the only factor that matters for language preference is the location where the communication was happening.

ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE
EFL (English as a Foreign Language) is a term which refers to the use of English in varied situations in a country where the dominant language being spoken is not English. Similar to Indonesia, it is used for specific occasions only, such as tourism, learning process, communicating with tourists, and so on. It is different from ESL (English as A Second Language), which is used in some countries and the use is balanced with their mother tongue, for instance: Malaysia and Singapore.

It is very important for teachers to improve their language skills in this era of globalization. Hereby, teachers are deemed qualified to provide accurate explanations of the learning materials and able to

support students to continue learning English. Thus, through learning and communication, it is very important for educators to provide the usefulness of studying English (Abid, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH APPROACH

In this study, the researcher used a qualitative approach. Qualitative approach is the process for understanding what problems that arise in a human's mind, forming a general picture through words, and producing detailed reports from the informants. This qualitative approach was chosen because the research design helps in gaining information about students' views on which language they prefer to use during the synchronous online classroom and why they prefer using the language.

SITE AND PARTICIPANTS

The data was collected through the internet because the situation and condition were not supported. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, all activities were carried out online. Therefore, to avoid its spread, the researcher chose to collect the data through online tools. The chosen media is Zoom for interviewing the participants and observing the class. The researcher will collect the data from students who are currently learning on Seminar on Language in the same class.

Seminar on Language subject is chosen for this study because it is one of the important subjects in English Department. This is an introductory course for students' thesis in the even semester, which is the time when this research was conducted. In this course, it is explained about what should be written in a research paper, how to present students' research, and all things related to the thesis. During the process of conducting research, students are also assisted by academic supervisors and Seminar on Language's lecturer by doing a research consultation regularly.

In order to conduct a study, the researcher used two principles which are accessibility and participants' characteristics that suit the aim of study. The population for this research is English Department students in the sixth semester. The sample has been taken from one class only.

DATA COLLECTION

The data collection process were done proceeded by a pilot study. Pilot study is an experiment method where the researcher would do a trial for the research instrument, whether the chosen method is effective or not. In this case, the researcher will use two kind of data collection technique. The first one is observation, which is a direct data collected method or it could be indirectly.

Besides, the researcher also used a semi-structured interview technique to elicit information from students. Semi-structured interview is a process for obtaining the information using open-ended questions to get the depth answers from participants (Alijoyo, 2020). The main questions comprise of

the participants' experiences during Seminar on Language online class, what language the participants use in that class, and the reason they are using the particular language.

For collecting the data, the researcher contacted the participants to make an appointment for an interview and the interview will be done via Zoom. The researcher used an online interview because of unsupportive circumstances which give limits for face-to-face meetings. Language that used for the interview is Bahasa in order to ease the communication, but participants are free to choose Bahasa or English for answering the question. Each participant had 20-30 minutes for an interview session and the researcher collected the sample from six students from the same Seminar on Language class in English Department. The interview was recorded using screen and voice recorder.

DATA ANALYSIS

After collecting the data, the researcher will present the data through the interview transcripts that have been collected. Since this study focuses on virtual communication during online learning, the researcher used thematic analysis as the data analysis method. Thematic analysis is a way to analyze the data through identifying the pattern themes from all the data that have been collected (Heriyanto, 2018). Other than that, thematic analysis was employed in this study to analyze the data. The thematic analysis relies on codes and themes for the data analysis. According to the theory, thematic analysis is an approach for identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes of a phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

This part provides insight into the data of language preferences of 6th semester English Department students. The data regarding students' interaction in class were generated from observation, while information regarding their experience during the Seminar on Language virtual class were collected from the interview. In the present work, the observation data were discussed firstly before exploring the interview data. During the observation, the researcher immediately joined the virtual Seminar on Language class and saw the learning process. The aspects to see during the observation was what language the participants used when communicating with lecturer. The result is the participants were using English during the Seminar on Language class.

Beside students' language preferences, lecturer's language preference matters here because based on the interview data, there are participants who feel that they have to adjust to the language used by the lecturer, for instance, the participant's answer below.

> *"...It depends on the lecturer."* (DI, Zoom Interview, April 30, 2021).

There is also participant who spontaneously use the language that was used by the person who talked to them. This statement related to DI's answer during the interview.

"If the question is using English, then I will use English spontaneously. But if the question is using Bahasa Indonesia, then I will answer with that language." (DI, Zoom Interview, April 30, 2021).

There are four themes in this study that address the research question, which are (1) course delivery mode; (2) students' language preferences; (3) classroom atmosphere; and (4) student-teacher interaction. The first one that will be discussed briefly is language preferences. Six participants stated their own language preferences that they said they used in Seminar on Language class. Most of them used mixed languages instead of using one full language. The participants reported that mixing languages help them express ideas clearly.

Furthermore, there is course delivery mode which explains how the subject is taught and the learning process goes. The learning has been transformed into virtual and students have to adapt with it. This is also affecting the situation in a class—which is an online class—so lecturers and students should make an agreement on how to distribute the material in order to make the learning process more effective.

Moreover, classroom atmosphere, as the name implies, focuses on the atmosphere and circumstances in the classroom such as students' participation and activity along the learning process. All the interview results were related to students' activity, how they feel about the situation in class, and the nature they do during online learning. Some of them clarified that they were focused on the research plan consultation. In these circumstances, one participant also felt sad because he felt the interaction boundaries in class. Not all the students are actively participating in online classes.

Last theme is student-teacher interaction. According to the research question about students' particular language when communicating orally with a lecturer, this theme helps to see students' language choice through their interaction in online class. From their point of views, the participants explained their own reasons about their language preferences and some supporting factors related to the language choice.

According to Sari & Wedasuwari (2014), there are two factors that cause language preferences, which are non-linguistic factors and situational factors. Non-linguistic factors include economic, social, education, age, and gender, and situational factors include to whom we are talking, what language is used during the conversation, place and time, and the topic of conversation. Several participants chose mixed languages—English and Bahasa—in Seminar on Language class.

"Sometimes it feels complicated to explain something in English, and I get confused to arrange those words into the right sentences. That is why sometimes I use Bahasa. But if I could explain it with English, I am still using English." (RM, Zoom Interview, March 31, 2021).

"Sometimes, we don't know the precise words, then we need to explain it with our mother tongue, in Bahasa, and it becomes easier rather than we explain the words by English." (AN, Zoom Interview, April 2, 2021).

Those two participants are more comfortable using mixed language for the same reasons. They feel it is easier to talk in two languages, so if they forget about the vocabulary, they could switch it in another language, English to Bahasa or from Bahasa to English. RM specifically added that he wants to arrange a good sentence, but it gets complicated when he loses vocabulary. Two participants, IM and NI, bring the same reasons about their language preferences inside the class.

"I will mix it, but sometimes I use Bahasa Indonesia. I can use English too, but I want to make it more clear." (NI, Zoom Interview, April 30, 2021).

"If I am using a mixed language, I could deliver the meaning more, rather than using Bahasa Indonesia." (IM, Zoom Interview, April 28, 2021).

"To explain our proposal, because it is conducted in English, then we will explain it in English. But sometimes I will mix it to deliver the meaning clearly." (FA, Zoom Interview, April 29, 2021).

Different perspectives come from DI, the other participants shared their experience as below.

"If the question is using English, then I will use English spontaneously. But if the question is using Bahasa Indonesia, then I will answer with that language. It depends on the lecturer." (DI, Zoom Interview, April 30, 2021).

DI said that she speaks language according to the language that is used by the person who speaks to her. In this case, she got affected by the lecturer's language. Language has a social control, which is language has a function for influencing human's action and behavior, so people that count in a conversation could understand each other. The students are admitting that they adapt with the lecturer to make them easier for understanding the material. Based on the explanation from DI, lecturer's language preferences for delivering the material also affect them to use that language too.

In online learning, students and lecturers want to find ways for understanding the material, so the learning process is still effective. Therefore, students have to build communication with the lecturer inside the class. In order to make an interaction, each human needs 'language' as the communication tool. Each participant has their own language preferences in Seminar on Language class to make them easier to communicate with lecturers.

DISCUSSION

In case of finding English majors' language preferences and their reasons for using it the most when communicating with their lecturer orally, the findings discover that they are more comfortable using a mix English and Indonesian language for stating their opinion clearly. Beside that, there is also a participant who said that usually she got influenced by the interlocutor's language. This is related to the theory about language choice, which is "who are they speaking to?".

There are three elements that influence human's language preferences, which are social distance, formality, and affective scale. Social distance scale is usually related to human relationship, whether it is intimate or not. Formality scale refers to the situation and condition of that interaction. Lastly, affective scale is related to how important, interesting, and informative the conversation goes.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that English Department students mostly use formal language when they are communicating with their lecturer orally. This formal language refers to interaction in learning process that happened in academic field, so students have to accustomed with academic words instead of using *slank* to communicate with lecturer. The first reason is the situation and condition required them to speak politely to an older person. In this case, they will adapt with the language used by that person when in conversation, because people mostly use the dominant language used in that specific situation. By this, two-way communication still happening if lecturer speaks in English and the students will respond with the same language.

The second possible thing is these students feel that they are English Department students, so at least they should make an effort to use that language. In the midst of this effort, the students got new challenges. For example, fear of grammatical mistakes, lost of vocabulary, mispronunciation, and so forth. Even there is a theory state that fear of being humiliated by friends is one of the greatest causes of anxiety.

After going through several challenges during conducting this research, the researcher discovered an unexpected finding in observation that students still use full English in SOL virtual class even though when they were interviewed, they admitted that they were more comfortable using mixed language. It can be seen that English majors still use full English rather than their own language preferences to show their pride as English Department students. Related to that case, there is a theory called language pride which is used by humans when they are in a proper condition to use that language and feel comfortable with that language (Binaningrum, 2020).

Moreover, he explained that inside the language pride, there is one factor which is language contact. This is a cause for humans to mix or switch the language because they feel comfortable with more than one language. Different from this study, the researcher found that the factor of language preferences by students is the dominant language used in the classroom. This can happen because the educator uses the particular language to deliver the material, so students will adapt by themselves. In brief, English majors was using full English in Seminar on Language class because the factor of language pride and they were trying to adjust with the dominant language used in class.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

CONCLUSION
This study investigated students' language preferences in English language learning context. Focused on online learning, it aimed to find out students' language preferences during communicating with lecturers and the reasons they were using the particular language. The researcher used a qualitative

approach and analyzed the data with thematic analysis. From the findings in the previous chapter, it can be concluded that English Department students in Seminar on Language virtual class are more comfortable using mixed languages, which are English and Indonesian language. It is proved by an interview session via Zoom with several participants in the sixth semester where these participants explained about their learning experience in Seminar on Language class. Meanwhile, according to the direct observations by the researcher, the average interaction carried out by students and lecturer in class is dominantly using English.

As it is discussed in the previous section, students' language preferences are affected by some factors, including politeness, language pride, also the dominant language used in one condition. The focus of this study is only on students' language preferences when communicating with lecturer on English language online learning. Anything related to language preferences—whether its students or teachers' language choice—on online or offline learning could be the consideration for further studies. It is important to conduct this research in order to find out language preferences used in learning process. By this, both lecturers and students can adjust to the language preferences that make students easier to understand, so that the learning process runs effectively.

This study is limited only to English majors' language preferences. During the research process, the researcher has difficulty differentiating the data classification. After that, the researcher attempted to distinguish each theme. These findings also related to further studies that could be conducted, which is the facilitators or teachers' language preferences, or anything related to online learning and language choice. This suggestion can complete the process for measuring foreign language learning effectiveness. It is expected to be the continuation and complement for this study.

SUGGESTION

The researcher proposed two suggestions. Firstly, during the learning process, the lecturer can explain in mixed languages, English and Indonesia, so that the students can easily receive the material. Besides, English could always be used, so that students get more exposure in English language, especially for English majors. By that, students get familiar with that language day by day. Lastly, this thesis can contribute to the conducted research related to online learning and language preferences. Future researchers could fill the gap areas to be the continuation of this study.

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