

***Developing Speaking Proficiency Using a Task-Based Approach Through
a Role-Play to Junior High School Students in Indonesia***

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The Asian Conference on Education 2017
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Nowadays, teaching speaking has become increasingly important since English has been regarded as a language for international communication. In addition, the demand of teaching speaking in EFL countries like in Indonesia has been increasing as there are large number of students who want to learn English for communicative purpose (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). However, English teachers in Indonesia rarely promote speaking skill in the class as they attempt to focus teaching other skills which are tested in the national examination. Due to this condition, the speaking proficiency among secondary students is simply low and they do not completely engage in speaking activity since their English teachers employ monotonous activities such as drilling, Grammar Translation Method, translation and so forth (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). Moreover, the speaking activities which the teachers apply do not represent meaningful and communicative activities in which the students can use English communicatively and meaningfully. Basically, one of principles in teaching English is promoting activities which encourage the students to use the target language “communicatively, meaningfully as well as effectively” (Luchini, 2004, as cited in Yen, Hou & Chang, 2015). Hence, task-based approach particularly using a role-play is a response to the demand to provide the optimal conditions for Indonesia’s junior high school students to develop their speaking ability in communicative and meaningful way. Role-play is regarded as a classroom activity which is suitable for realism as it provides the learners opportunities to rehearse certain activities which they will likely perform in a real life.

Keywords: Speaking Proficiency, Tasked-based Approach, Role-play, Junior High School Students

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Introduction

English has become a compulsory subject to be taught in junior high school level in Indonesia. As a result, this subject is tested in national examination of Indonesia in which all junior high school students must participate it in the last year of their grade. In fact, national examination in which English is tested simply focuses on listening, reading, and writing examination (Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). Even though the curriculum of teaching English in Indonesia accommodates all skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing, in fact, the students are not tested on their speaking skill in the national examination. Due to this phenomenon, in teaching practice where English is taught in the class, many Indonesian English teachers simply focus on teaching skills to be tested in national examination namely listening, reading and writing and they rarely conduct a speaking activity in their class. This fact is problematic for English teaching in Indonesia as speaking skill also should be mastered by Indonesia's students due to its importance.

Nowadays, teaching speaking has become increasingly important since English has been regarded as a language for international communication. In addition, the demand of teaching speaking in EFL countries like in Indonesia has been increasing as there are large number of students who want to learn English for communicative purpose (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). In other words, speaking skill is completely needed for the students in order to able to communicate in English globally. In Indonesia context, the ability of spoken performance in English becomes one of qualifications in applying for a certain job which needs good English spoken ability such as, a manager of company, an executive of marketing, a labour in international company and so forth. Moreover, in university level the ability of speaking English becomes one of qualifications in enrolling for certain majors in some universities in Indonesia. Furthermore, recently there are many young Indonesian who get a chance to study abroad from Indonesian government or other countries. In this case, the ability of speaking English is needed to be able to communicate and achieve the learning success in abroad. Hence, due to those considerable importance, the students need to have exposure in learning speaking skill starting from junior high school.

As stated previously that English teachers in Indonesia rarely promote speaking skill in the class as they attempt to focus teaching other skills which are tested in the national examination. Due to this condition, the speaking proficiency among secondary students is simply low and they do not completely engage in speaking activity since their English teachers employ monotonous activity such as drilling, Grammar Translation Method, translation and so forth (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). Moreover, the speaking activities which the teachers apply do not represent meaningful and communicative activities in which the students can use English communicatively and meaningfully. As a research conducted by Tutyandari in 2005 reveals some facts that many Indonesian students keep silent during speaking activity as they do not feel self -confident to speak up, have lack prior knowledge of the topic, as well as the class has poor teacher-learner relationship. In addition, another research conducted by Padmadewi (1998) shows that Indonesian students feel anxious during the speaking activity due to pressure from the speaking tasks which require them to speak individually and spontaneously within the limited time. Moreover, as my personal experience when I was in junior high school, my English teacher taught speaking skill through Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in which it is regarded as

inappropriate technique to teach speaking. From the elaboration above, it can be clearly seen that the reason why the speaking proficiency of secondary students is completely low as the technique used by Indonesia's English teachers is inappropriate. Moreover, the inappropriate technique used by the teachers also make them do not enjoy and engage in the speaking activities.

Basically, one of principles in teaching English is promoting activities which encourage the students to use the target language "communicatively, meaningfully as well as effectively" (Luchini, 2004, as cited in Yen, Hou & Chang, 2015). In other words, the teachers have to create a communicative learning atmosphere in which the students are able to practice and use the target language in communicative way. Hence, task-based approach is a response to the demand to provide the optimal conditions for Indonesia's junior high school students to develop their speaking ability in communicative and meaningful way. The task-based approach involves the use of tasks which engage students in meaningful interactions and negotiations (Richard, 2002) through using a role-play strategy. The use of role play in teaching speaking is proved to be an effective way to develop students' speaking ability as it incorporates the replication of real-world situations in which the students can use English communicatively (Yen, Hou & Chang, 2015). In addition, the idea of using task-based approach through a role play is in line with reflection which I wrote at the beginning of this course. As an English teacher, I have to develop my students' English skills in communicative way through using some teaching techniques or teaching approaches which promote communicative and meaningful activities. After completing this course, the material which have been served in this course deepen my understanding toward some teaching approaches which are appropriate to achieve the goal of teaching English. Looking at the phenomenon of teaching speaking in Indonesia context particularly in secondary school level which has been well elaborated previously strengthens my belief that the use of task-based approach through a role-play is one of ways to develop students' speaking proficiency communicatively and meaningfully.

This essay will be divided into two sections. The first section will elaborate the background of the study, principles in teaching speaking, the concept of task-based approach as well as the idea of role-playing in teaching speaking. Meanwhile, the second section of this essay will discuss the application of the use of task-based approach through role-play which is linked to theoretical frameworks that have been discussed in the first section. Furthermore, the last part of this essay is a conclusion.

The principle of teaching speaking

Speaking is defined as a specific spoken discourse which is mainly social and involved in social purposes as well as in social context (Nazara, 2011). From this notion, it can be understood that the core point of speaking is representing interaction and social engagement among its speakers in which those two points should exist in conducting speaking activities. Bringing those points into teaching practice particularly in EFL (English as Foreign Language) context is found quite challenging since there is a perception that speaking is regarded as a difficult skill to be mastered by EFL students (Hinkel, 2005, as cited in Nazara, 2011). The reason why they have this kind perceptions since they do not have much exposure in learning speaking in the class. Therefore, they do not have habits in practicing their spoken aspect then

make them coming to the idea that speaking is a difficult skill to be mastered. Moreover, the learning environment in the class does not provide any interactive environment where the students can use English in communicative way.

Teaching speaking merely has a purpose to build communicative competence among the students in the class. As stated by Murcia (2001) that the goal of teaching speaking is to encourage the students to achieve the acquisition of communication skill as well as to foster the students to use the language in real communication. Hence, in conducting speaking activities, English teachers need to consider this principle. The idea of communicative competence is developed under the view of language as context, language as interaction, as well as language as negotiation. It means that learning to speak English requires more than understanding its semantic as well as grammatical aspect of the language but importantly emphasizes more on how to use the language appropriately in social interaction. Canale and Swain (1981) argued that communicative competence in speaking consists of four competences namely grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence. All these communicative competences completely influence speaking proficiency of the students.

The concept of task-based approach

Task-based approach refers to an approach of language learning which focuses on doing a certain task to achieve an outcome of language learning (Ellis, 2003). In other words, this approach encourages the students in learning language by providing learning activities which focuses on tasks. The types of tasks can be in the form of presenting pictures, drama, role-play, realia, and many others. The main focus of giving the task is to achieve the goal of language learning in which the students are able to use the language communicatively. As contended by Ellis (2003), task-based approach requires some tasks which involve primary focus on meaning in which the learners can engage in using language practically instead of displaying the language. Aliakbari and Jamalvandi (2010) also added that task-based approach attempts to engage learners in actual use of the target language through instruction as well as effective communication. Discussing the idea of task, there are several resources which concern about this term. Nunan (1989, as cited in Aliakbari & Jamalyandi, 2010) argued that a communicative task is defined as a piece of classroom activities which engage the learners to understand, manipulate, assist and interact in the target language which their focus is particularly on meaning rather than on form. Moreover, Willis (2006, as cited in Aliakbari & Jamalyandi, 2010) believed that task refers to a goal-oriented activity which has clear aims. From those two resources, it can be concluded that task in this approach means any tasks which are presented in classroom activities that aim to encourage the students in understanding, manipulating, assisting as well as communicating in the target language.

Basically, there some phases in applying task-based approach namely pre-task, during task, and post-task (Ellis, 2003). In pre-task stage, the students are given several activities which provide adequate support for them to deal with a set of complex tasks as well as challenging tasks. On certain cases, the learners are exposed with the knowledge of new vocabulary, grammar, or other knowledge of language functions. Meanwhile, in during task stage the students are engaged in meaningful activity where interaction and communication occur. Then in the last stage, the students get

an opportunity to get feedback and comments toward the activity which they have done. As argued by Ellis (2003) that in this stage the teachers will follow up the task performance. As stated previously that task-based approach comprises a set of activities and in this discussion, a role-play will be used to develop speaking proficiency of junior high school students in Indonesia.

The overview of a role-play

1. The idea of a role-play

Role-play is regarded as an effective strategy which focuses on the ability to speak and interact by playing different roles in a given real-world context (Yen, Hou & Chang, 2015). Meanwhile, Van Ments (1989) stated that role-play is an activity which requires the students to practise interacting with others in certain roles in which the situation is conducted by producing a scenario and a set of role of descriptions. It can be stated that a role-play refers to a teacher's technique in teaching in which the students are asked to perform and act a certain role which the purpose of the activity is to encourage the students to communicate with others. Moreover, Al-Arishi (1994) also added another point of a role-play that it is regarded as a classroom activity which is suitable for realism as it provides the learners opportunities to rehearse certain activities which they will likely perform in a real life such as: greetings, asking for directions, ordering stuff in malls, or conducting a transaction at a bank and so forth. In a role-play, the students are not only a play-actor but also a decision-maker as well since the activity encourages them to use the target language communicatively with others.

Basically, a role-play has some characteristics. According to Richard (1985), a role-play is regarded as a communicative activity which has several characteristics. Firstly, it requires opportunities for the learners to practice strategies for opening, developing, as well as closing conversational occasion. In the application of a role-play, the students will engage in several activities which can make them improving their ability to open, develop, and close interactional activity. Moreover, a role-play also encourages the learners to develop meaning collaboratively. Furthermore, it initiates the use of turn-taking rules as well as provides a high degree of learner participation. In conducting a role-play, there are two basic techniques which can be applied namely fish-bowl and multiple technique (Van Ments, 1989). Fish-bowl technique is the way in arranging the role-play in which the player of the role-play in this case is students perform the role-play in front of other students in the class. The main point of this technique is there will be only a pair or a group of students who will perform the role-play and the rest of the class will watch the role-play. In other words, all students in the class will not perform the role-play at the same time but they will do it in turn. Meanwhile, multiple technique of role-play refers to a style of arranging a role-play where all students in the class will perform a role-play in a pair or in a group at the same time then the teachers will monitor their performance.

2. The concept of using a role-play in teaching speaking

Basically, the main concern of applying a task-based approach through a role-play in this context aims to improve the students' proficiency in speaking. As elaborated previously that task-based approach consists of three stages namely, pre-task, during-

task, as well as post-task (Ellis, 2003). Hence, the concept of applying a role-play in teaching speaking in this context will be developed through those stages. During pre-task activity, the teachers will make some preparations for the students to be ready in performing a role-play in the class such as dividing the students into groups, as well as preparing the scenario of the role-play. Moreover, the teachers also explain some rules in performing the role-play. In addition, in this stage the teachers need to set up the atmosphere of the class more relaxed and enjoyable. This idea is in line with what has been contended by Van Ments (1989) that before the teachers come to the application of a role-play in the class, they need to create a relaxed and joyful condition through doing a warming-up activity. The warming-up activity can be done through playing a game.

Meanwhile, on the during-task section the students start doing the task. Firstly, the students need to write the scenario of the role-play. As stated by Van Ments (1989), writing the scenario of the role-play is regarded as a helpful way for students before presenting the role-play as this activity involves ways of describing the detail scenario and the writing of briefs for each role-player. In addition, in this stage, the students will actively perform their role in the role-play. They will use the target language in presenting a role-play in the class. In this case, the teacher will monitor the students' performance in presenting the role-play. At the last, on the post-task, the teacher will conduct a debriefing activity which allows the students to get a feedback after doing a role-play. Debriefing is regarded as an important activity to be done by the teachers due to some reasons. As contended by Van Ments (1989) that in debriefing activity, the teachers make a clarification toward a role-play performing which the students have done and underline some important points which have occurred during the role-play activity. In addition, in this stage the teachers make some connections toward knowledge which the students have acquired and need to be acquired in the future.

The application of using a task-based approach through a role-play in teaching speaking

In applying some theoretical frameworks which have been elaborated in the section 1 into some steps in the classroom, the elaboration of detail context where this approach is applied is simply needed. The application of this teaching approach will be applied to junior high school students on the eighth grade. On this grade, the students are hopefully able to use transactional expressions (asking and giving an opinion; giving and responding to an invitation) in communicating with their friends (Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). Hence, the use of the role-play in teaching speaking in this context will focus on those basic competences above. Before starting the role-play stages, the teachers need to explain the material about some expressions of asking and giving an opinion as well as giving and responding to an invitation. The teachers firstly distribute a handout to the students which contains some utterances in expressing how to ask and give an opinion as well as give and respond to an invitation. During this part, the teachers also give some examples on how to use those expressions in a dialogue. The teachers show a video which contains some dialogues using those expressions.

Dealing with the activity of the role-play, the stages of doing the role-play will be developed through some stages based on the task-based approach. There will be three phases in applying the task-based approach through role-play namely pre-task,

during-task as well as post-task (Ellis, 2013). On pre-task phase, the teachers start eliciting the students' interest through doing a warming up activity. The teachers will play a game namely "Talking down" game which is adopted from Davison and Gordon (1978). The teachers ask the students to sit in a pair. The core point of this game is creating a relaxed atmosphere in the class before the students play the main activity namely a role-play as well as recalling the students' previous understanding toward the lesson. The teachers ask them to engage in conversation with the topic which is given by the teachers. The topic is about the lesson which has been explained previously (expression of asking and giving an opinion; giving and responding to an invitation). One student asks a question toward what lesson has been taught by the teachers then another student answers with appropriate answer. In addition, each of them also can ask some expressions which are used to ask and give an opinion as well as give and respond to an invitation. After that, the teachers tell the students that they will play a role-play in the class and ask the students to work in a pair. Then, the teachers explain some rules of playing a role-play to the students. In conducting the role-play, each group is asked to choose one card which contains a scenario of the role-play. In this case, the teachers prepare two kinds of card namely a green and a yellow card. The green card consists of the scenario in which the students need to do a role-play of asking for an opinion. Meanwhile, the yellow card describes the scenario in which the students ask to do a role-play of giving and responding an invitation.

Then, on the during-task section, the students firstly prepare for the role-play performance by writing the scenario. After each group has gotten the card, the teachers will ask them to write down some dialogues based on the scenario which they have gotten. The idea of writing the scenario before performing the role-play is line with what have been argued by Van Ments (1989) that the students are encouraged to write a scenario before doing a role-play. While the students are writing the scenario, the teachers monitor the students' activity by observing each group. In this case, the teacher takes a role as a facilitator since they will help the students in tackling the problems during making the scenario. The aim of writing the scenario does not mean that the students can read the scenario while performing the role-play. However, its purpose is to give the students overview of their role and conversation which they need to say during the role-play. In addition, the idea of applying this task-based approach through a role-play aims to encourage the students to engage using English to communicate with others in which this activity can develop the students' proficiency in speaking. After they have finished writing the scenario, they are given several minutes to do a rehearsal activity. Giving a rehearsal activity can make the students feel more confident in doing the role-play. After they have done with rehearsal activity, then each group will perform the role-play. In arranging the role-play, the teachers in this case will use a "fish bowl" technique where each group needs to perform the role play in turn (Van Ments, 1989). The use of this technique can ease the teachers to monitor the students' performance. In performing the role-play, it can be observed that the students involve in using English meaningfully and communicatively. They do a conversation based on the topic given by the teachers. The role-play which they do gives them an opportunity to interact and negotiate meaningfully with their friends (Richard, 2002).

Then at the post-task, the teachers will conduct a debriefing activity. In this phase, the teachers will give comments and feedbacks toward the students' performance. The comments which are given about some grammatical errors, pronunciation, gestures, as

well as expression in performing the role-play. Moreover, in this section the teachers also review the lesson and activities which the students have done and implicitly link today's lesson with the lesson which they are going to teach on next meeting.

Conclusion

In conclusion, looking at the teaching speaking phenomenon which occurs in junior high schools of Indonesia, the idea of using a task-based approach through a role-play is implemented. The phenomenon comes out when there are many English teachers in Indonesia who merely ignore to teach speaking skill as this skill is not tested in national examination. Furthermore, they sometimes use inappropriate technique in teaching speaking. As a result, the students' speaking ability among junior high school students is low. In applying a task-based approach through a role-play, there are three stages which are applied during the learning process namely pre-task, during-task as well as post-task. On pre-task stage, the teachers will make some preparations for the students to be ready in performing a role-play in the class such dividing the students into groups, as well as preparing the scenario of the role-play. Meanwhile, during doing task, the students will do several activities, one of them is writing the scenario. Then on the post-task, the teacher will conduct a debriefing activity which allow the students to get a feedback after doing a role-play.

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