A Case Study of NL Influence in Students' Interlanguage

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Abstract: Interlanguage is a learner's phase in developing their competence in second language (L2). This study intends to find out whether the students go through the phase of interlanguage in their attempt to acquire second language and whether their interlanguage forms similar system as postulated in Krashen's hypotheses. A structured writing test of 150 words essay was given to thirty students of fourth semester students of University of Islam Syekh Yusuf Tangerang, faculty of teacher training and education of English Department. Their writing results were then analyzed focusing on how pluralization of nouns is formed and classification is made based on the pluralization formats. It is found that the students formed 134 times of different format of nouns. The learners formed interlanguage of pluralization in which they formed count nouns from what the TL rule acknowledges as non-count nouns by adding articles (a/an). They also formed singular nouns into plural form and vice versa which may be caused by the L1 influence of noun concept. The pluralization forms also consist of characteristics of previously learned languages, features of L2 and general interlanguage characteristics.

1 INTRODUCTION

Regardless to the facts that English is being taught to Indonesian students from early age, many Indonesians are still thriving in acquiring the language. They find it quite troublesome to acquire the language especially up to the level of communicative competence. Wong-Fillmore in Jay (2003) described learning a second language as a process that consists of learning large chunks of speech that are used for communication purposes. However, Second Language Acquisition has several obstacles for learners to face and yet the successfulness of mastering the language never surmounts to the one of the native speakers. Learners have never been able to acquire the language as any native does. Mistakes are made and inter-language is unavoidable.

Learning a second language (SL) is different from acquiring first language (L1) in terms that in SL learning learners are already equipped with L1 knowledge. Rueda (2006) states that adult L2 or FL learners initially rely on L1 transfers to communicate linguistic action in the TL. Therefore, although some learners may be more successful than the others, mistakes are made and inter-language is unavoidable. For Selinker as cited in Tarone (2006)

SL acquisition is different from L1 acquisition, so there is no child language (but interlanguage) as the original mechanism for learning (lateralization) are atrophied (fossilization). Selinker as cited in Tarone (2006) defines interlanguage as the linguistic system evidenced when an adult second language learner attempts to express meaning in the language being learned. Learner's interlanguage is considered as a phase a learner goes through in developing their competence in L2.

Krashen (1982) presents an average order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes for English as a second language of children and adults as the following:

ING (progressive); PLURAL; COPULA ("to be") ---> AUXILIARY (progressive, as in "he is going"); ARTICLE (a, the) ---> IRREGULAR PAST ---> REGULAR PAST; III SINGULAR -s; POSSESSIVE -s

This means that L2 learners are more likely to form an interlanguage in respect to this order. In terms of pluralization Bahasa Indonesia case of pluralization is very different from English, in which Sneddon (2010) states that plurality in Indonesian is indicated by reduplication (p.20), numbers (p.60) and quantifiers (p.136) whereas English has regular

form of pluralization which is inflected by morpheme –s/-es and irregular form of pluralization. This may be difficult for some students to master inferring that they are highly influenced by their L1 paradigm. A learner may develop an interlanguage system in which just one of such factors governs a set of form-function associations, which should be described in their own right, regardless that the yield forms are not allowed by L2 rules.

The students of University of Islam Syekh Yusuf Tangerang, faculty of teacher training and education of English Department have fairly poor L2 competence (as inflicted from the entrance test results in the form of TOEFL prediction test which showed less than 5% of the students got more than 400, 95% are between 330-400). Therefore, this paper intends to find out whether the students (30 students) go through the phase of interlanguage in their attempt to L2 acquisition and to find out the patterns of pluralization of their interlanguage, whether it is highly influence by their L1 or not; and to what extent is the influence. The study is aimed to provide description on how L1 may influence students' language production in their attempt to achieve competence in second language.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Ellis (1997: pp. 3-5) defines second language acquisition as the study of the way people learn a language besides their mother tongue. SLA is emphasized on the nature of learnability which influenced by the social background where the learning takes place and the input that the learners obtained. L2 learners are said to be successful when they have the language competence and language performance. The term competence-performance was first introduced by Chomsky in 1965 to refer to "knowledge of grammar and of other aspects of language and performance to mean the language use". Chomsky believes that the competence of someone can be determined by the performance or how they use the language and vice-versa (Ellis, 1994, p.5). Yule (2006, p.169) asserts that communicative competence is "the general ability to use language accurately, appropriately, and flexibly", which means L2 learners are expected to achieve communicative competence, a competence which covers grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and communication strategy.

However, L2 learners may not find the ease of acquiring this competence-performance as they did

with their L1. Saville (2006) said that there are differences in L1 and L2 learning, in which although learners of both L1 and L2 go through similar initial state, during the second phase, the L2 learners develop a mental sequence which is known as interlanguage (learner language). Interlanguage, as defined by Ellis (2003), is "the structured system which the learner constructs at any given stage in his development" and "the series of interlocking system or learner's 'build-in syllabuses." Similarly, Tavakoli (2012) states that interlanguage is "the type of language produced by second- and foreign-language learners who are in the process of learning a language". Learner's interlanguage is the competence that L2 learners obtained in their effort of acquiring L2 which is not a part of L2 nor derived from learner's native language.

Interlanguage may quite commonly exhibit systematic properties which show no apparent resemblance to the native language or any other language known to the learner. In some cases, interlanguage systems occur which are different from both the target and native language even where these latter resemble each other (Corder, 1981). Selinker as cited in Tarone (2006) asserts that there are five psycholinguistic processes of the latent psychological structure that shape interlanguage, which are: native language transfer, overgeneralization of target language rules, transfer of training (i.e. a rule enters the learner's system as a result of instruction), strategies of communication (i.e.an identifiable approach by the learner to communication with native speakers) , and strategies of L2 learning (i.e.an identifiable approach by the learner to the material to be learned).

Interlanguage therefore is different from learner's error or mistake in which error is gap in learner's knowledge whereas mistake is occasional lapses in performance (Ellis, 2003), which means that interlanguage is learner's creation of linguistic element as his/her attempt to acquire L2. Hence, a learner may develop an interlanguage system in which just one of such factors governs a set of form-function associations, which should be described in their own right, regardless of the fact that they yield forms not allowed by L2 rules. It is well-understood that interlanguages are autonomous and rule-governed linguistic systems whose grammar cannot be described simply in terms of errors and deviations from L2 norms.

3 METHODS

The study was carried out by giving a structured writing test to thirty students of fourth semester students of University of Islam Syekh Yusuf Tangerang, faculty of teacher training and education of English Department. Students were asked to write an approximately 150 words essay based on the given pictures. Students were told that the purpose of the writing is on the flow of the story. This is done so they did not focus on the grammar accuracy. The result of their writing then analyzed focusing on how the students form their pluralization of nouns and after that classification is made based on the pluralization formats. The task was taken from Tarone and Swierzbin (2009) which is in the form of sequence pictures for narrative task.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION: THE STUDENTS' INTERLANGUAGE OF PLURALIZATION

In writing the narrative essay, the students formed new format of pluralization in which they did not follow rules of the native language or the target language (of English). The thirty students formed 134 times of different format of nouns. The students' production of the language shows that they formed an interlanguage of pluralization as can be described in the table below:

Table 1: Number of occurrences of interlanguage types.

Types of Interlanguage	Number of Occurrence
UC-C	60
Sg-Pl	56
Pl-Sg	20
Form	7

The learners formed interlanguages of pluralization which comprise the use of countable form for uncountable nouns, the use of singular form for plural nouns and vice-versa, and double the pluralization forms.

In UC-C, learners formed countable forms of what were supposed to be uncountable in English (L1), for example: *a sugar, foods, a bread, a jam, and a food.* The learners did this mostly that it reaches 42%. The learners also put the singular nouns into plural forms and vice-versa, for example: *young girls, other things, an old woman, some candy, some egg, and many things.* In forming plural

for singular nouns, the learners made 56 attempts, that are 39.2% and forming singular for plural nouns for 20x which is 14% of the total interlanguage formed. Besides those items mentioned above, the learners also construct 'double pluralization' such as: a somethings and *two children's* but only 7 times out of 143 times.

In Bahasa Indonesia pluralization forms are not constructed by adding any inflection to the nouns. Reduplication, numbers, and quantifiers are used to form the nouns into plural forms, for example: *"rumah"* is singular, but *"rumah-rumah"* is plural, *"dua rumah"* is plural, and *"beberapa rumah"* is also plural. However, the learners formed pluralization forms without following Bahasa Indonesia or English's rules of pluralization. Take for example when they *wrote a sugar.* The concept of sugar is also uncountable in Bahasa Indonesia, yet they put it into countable by deliberately placed an 'a' as indefinite singular marker. The learners added –s inflection to plural nouns such as children and women too.

The learners seemed to be confused with the concept of numbers which are usually determined by partitives or classifiers in Bahasa Indonesia. Sneddon (2010) writes that partitives indicate a particular amount of something. They precede the head word, which can be either a count or a non-count noun. Count noun can alternatively be preceded by cardinal number or a number plus classifier but non-count nouns cannot. To indicate singular, se- 'one' precedes the partitive. Partitives are often mixed up with classifiers. However, there is clear distinction: classifiers group nouns on the basis of some perceived intrinsic characteristics, while partitives group nouns on the basis of how they are measured, assembled, or processed.

The learners formed different format of pluralization, which can be categorized as their interlanguage in their effort to acquiring the TL. The learners' attempt to describe nouns seems to be affected by the concept of inflection as a generalization of the TL rules of pluralization. In English, regular form of pluralization is marked by adding inflection –s, which made them adding –s to most nouns they wrote. The learners' production can also be categorized as being influenced by their native language as there is similarity in the forming of the nouns. Considering that Bahasa Indonesia does not classifies nouns into count and non-count, the learners made generalization for most nouns, such as: jam, bread, and food into count noun. Their native language also assists them in term of forming the concept that the noun should be preceded by a

determiner in which they got confused between classifier and partitives. This reasoning may be the reason why they put indefinite determiner 'a' before uncountable nouns.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that the learners formed interlanguage of pluralization in which they formed count nouns from what the TL rule acknowledges as non-count nouns by adding articles (a/an). They also formed singular nouns into plural form and vice versa which may be caused by the L1 influence of noun concept, for example: repetition in Bahasa Indonesia in the word "*anak-anak*" could mean both child/ little boy or girl (singular) or children (plural). This L1 noun concept could influence the learners to transfer the rule into forming TL linguistic material. In forming the pluralization, the learners also overgeneralized TL rule, in which they add inflection –s to nouns which they considered to be plural such as children's and women.

Language acquisition is not a cumulative linear process and it therefore cannot be predicted when a certain form will become learnable for a certain learner. In forming pluralization, the learners applied two of five processes of language learning which lead to the forming of interlanguage, which are native language transfer and overgeneralization of TL linguistic materials. The pluralization forms also consist of characteristics of previously learned languages, features of L2 and general interlanguage characteristics such as omission of function words and grammatical morphemes as the indication of interlanguage phase.

In relation to that, Ruegg (2010) claims that language learners are in the process of developing their language skills. They are making different types of errors, which is the manifestation of the development of interlanguage. Thus, when the learners made errors in forming the pluralization, they were in the phase of acquiring the TL by forming interlanguage. Interlanguage evolves over time as a result of various strategies that learners use to make sense of the language input and to control the output. Therefore, some elements of the interlanguage may be the result of learners' specific approach to the language material to be learnt, i.e. their selection of learning strategies.

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