Questions and Answers in EFL Classroom: Indonesian Context

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Abstract

This study aims at knowing: 1) types of questions and answers used in *English as Foreign Language* (EFL) classroom dialogue of Junior High School in the city of Kupang, Indonesia; and 2) grammatical errors of questions and answers used by teacher and students in EFL classroom dialogue of the school studied. The research used a qualitative research method. Its subjects were one EFL teacher and His grade VIII students that have been chosen purposively. The instruments used for data collection were interviews and observations. Data were analyzed descriptively. The result shows that there were five types of questions and answers used by teacher and students in EFL classroom dialogues. They were descriptive questions, relational question, causal questions, the grammatical form including polar questions and non-polar questions. The errors found in the teacher and students' questions and answers were ommission, misformation, and misordering.

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1. Introduction

As one of the major international languages, English is now intensively learned by many people in countries like Indonesia where English is a foreign language. They learn it in order to master it, namely, to be able to use it in speaking, listening, reading, and writing as well as translating. In other words, the aim of one's learning English is to talk and communicate locally, nationally, and globally using the language with people around him/her (Nan, 2005).

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Despite their hard work to learn it, however, many learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) fail to be fluent in using it (Astika, 2007; Harsono, 2005; Kweldju, 2003). Both teacher and students are responsible for EFL learning to be successfully founded to achieve the goals of language learning. Fluency in using the language orally and written becomes one of the goals set in its lesson plan (Cf. Marpaung & Hambandima, 2018).

A common problem of EFL classroom is that an EFL teacher is usually faced with a non – interactive classroom where students are frequently unresponsive and avoid interacting with their teacher. Most of the students keep quiet and do not respond to the teacher's questions. This problem is very important because interaction within the classroom can bring about many advantages for language learning such as comprehension checks, language practice and so on (Ellis, 1993). On the communication, it consists of questions and answers between teacher(s) and student(s). Teachers asking students questions is a common technique used for teaching or improving students ability (Cf. Alvermann & Phelps, 2002; Anthony & Raphael, 2004; Ford-ham, 2006; Good & Brophy, 2000; Gunning, 1992).

Within the line of such thoughts, this study intends to examine how teachers' questions influence their students' learning in an EFL classroom, that is, a classroom in a country where English is not a dominant language although the students in such class share the same language and culture. Outside of the classroom, their students have very few opportunities to use English. In other words, for the students, exposure to English- speaking culture is very limited. Taking those thoughts into account, this research is aimed at knowing (1) types of questions and answers used in an EFL classroom dialogue of Junior High School in the city of Kupang, Indonesia; and (2) grammatical errors of questions and answers used by teacher and students in EFL classroom dialogue of the school studied. We believe that achieving these aims will help EFL teachers and students alike create more comprehensive EFL interactions that, in turn, help them develop well their potentials, whatever they are.

2.   Materials and Methods

This research conducted in May 2015 is classified into descriptive research whose aim is to describe a phenomenon (Gall & Borg, 1989; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), so that it can be understood well in its context and that its problems, if any, can be overcome. In the context of this research, the phenomena to be described, as have been mentioned in previous section, are types of questions and answers used in *English as Foreign Language* (EFL) classroom dialogue of Junior High School in the city of Kupang, Indonesia; and grammatical errors of questions and answers used by teacher and students in EFL classroom dialogue of the school studied.

Its research subjects were one class that consisted of students and the teacher of SMPK St. Joseph in Kupang City, Indonesia. The class was grade VIII. There were 32 students in the classroom. The subjects that have been mentioned were selected purposively, that is, for such reasons as the class size which is not too small, and their teacher has a great understanding of what the researchers want to do in the classroom.

The instruments used to get data were analyzed descriptively based on the research questions and research aims stated. For error analysis, the researchers used taxonomy theory of Dulay *et al.* (1982). Next, for clarify, the researchers use such code as *T* for the teacher(s) and *Ss* for students of *S* for a singular student. In addition, the correct forms of questions and answers are written in brackets.

3.   Results and Discussions

3.1 Types of Questions and Answer in an EFL Classroom

It is found that in the EFL classroom that we have studied, there are five types of questions and answers, that is clarifying questions and answers, relation question and answer, causal questions and answers, polar questions and answers, and non-polar questions and answers.

3.1.1 Clarifying Questions and Answers

This type of questions and answers are used primarily with the aim of describing the existence of something or process. The types of questions and answers found in the observation of EFL classroom are displayed as follows.

Text 1
Teacher (T)   : *why you cannot see something?*
Students (Ss)   : *because eyes is closed*

The students' answer to the question is logical as they give a reason for not seeing anything when they close their eyes. So, in Text 1, the teacher asks his students why they cannot see 'something' and the students say that they cannot see it because their eyes are closed. In that sense, the teacher wants to know their reason for not seeing an object. Since the starts with the question word *why,* this question may also be regarded as a non-polar question to be described later.

In addition, based on the researchers' observation, the teacher also asks questions to lead his students into a topic that is going to be discussed as in the following Text 2.

Text 2
T   : *Killer or Keller?*
Ss   : *Killer 'pembunuh', Keller 'nama orang'.*

In asking his students the question as such, the teacher wants to check his students; understanding of the difference between *Killer* and *Keller.* In other words, he wants them to choose which one is correct: Killer (verb) or Keller (Someone's name). The students answer their teacher correctly by saying that *Killer* means someone who kills somebody or something, while *Keller* means someone's name.

Text 2 is also related to the following Text 3, that is, the teacher wants to know how his students know that a thing is a bool without seeing it. So, he asks them how they know that the thing is a book. The students say that it is because they can feel it.

Text 3
T   : *How do you know that is a book?*
Ss   : Can feel it.

3.1.2 Relation Question and Answers

Relational questions are designed to look at the relationship between two or more variable. Variables, in this case, are some aspects which related to classroom interaction in English teaching and learning process. Some questions and answers which are found in the EFL classroom at St. Joseph Junior High School Kupang are presented in Tex 4 below.

Text 4
T   : *Have you read the text?*
Ss   : *Yes !*

In text 4, the teacher wants his students to be related to 'the text' that they are going to discuss, that is, a text on Hellen Keller. In other words, in asking students the questions, the teacher does not really want to check them whether they have read the text or not. What he basically wants is to lead his students to the text, that is, how familiar they are with the text to be read soon. Therefore, the question given has the purpose of relating his students to something that will be done.

This is also the case for Text 5 below. A dialogue is created in order to find out a relationship between two or more variables.

Text 5
T   : *What is the title of the text?*
Ss   : *The story of Hellen Keller.*

In text 5, the teacher's question has been designed to relate his students to the text they supposed to read. In other words, his purpose is to relate the question to the topic that they are discussing. In that sense, the teacher does not

mean to check whether his students know the title or not but it is simply to relate what they are reading to what they are going to discuss.

3.1.3 Causal Questions and Answers

    Causal questions are designed to determine whether certain variables affect one or more custom variables. Variables are things that measured or discussed. The question of this type is displayed in text 6 below.

Text 6
T   : *If I ask to close your eyes. Can you feel something in your bag?*
                             Can you feel what you take?
Ss   : *Book (Together)*

This question has a purpose on asking the cause of feeling something (*can you feel something in your bag? Can you feel what you take?*). This question indicates that when students feel something in their bag, they can identify that is a book. The question is called as causal because it needs an answer which caused by something that has resulted as an effect. The cause of this question is feeling something, and the effect knows the object *book*.
    Another example of a causal question and answer can also be seen in the following text 7.

Text 7
T   : *Can you see something?*
Ss   : *No*
T   : *Why?*
S-1   : *Dark*

The dialogue in text 7 shows that there is a causal question. The teacher knows that they cannot see anything when they close their eyes. This question needs a reason which indicates something/circumstance happens that caused by another to get an effect. The causal in this dialogue is according to the observation.

3.1.4 Polar Questions and Answers

    Polar questions or closed questions that have to be answered by 'Yes' or 'No'. They are asked to know whether statements are true or not. They are called yes-no questions. Through the classroom observation, the researcher found that there are questions and answers of teacher and students in EFL classroom dialogue used as polar questions. The researchers display text 8 and text 9 following to be discussed. The discussion is as follow.

Text 8
T   *: Have you read the text?*
Ss   *: Yes*

Text 9
T   *: Can you feel something in your bag?*
Ss   *: Book (together)*

These two questions are started by present perfect 'have' and modal auxiliary 'can'. These questions automatically have answers 'yes' or 'no'. The question in text 8 '*have you read the text?*' has answered 'yes we have. The answer 'yes' has been given when the question matches with the situation (the students have read the text). In contrast, when the question is not match with context, the answer will be *No, we haven't.* Then, the question in text 9 '*can you feel something in your bag?*' Also needs an answer 'yes' or 'no'. In line with a question in text 8, this question requires an answer that must be appropriate with the questions used. If the question is started by *can,* the answer also will be followed by '*can*' after '*yes*' or '*no*'. Regardless of this context the answer above actually *yes, 'we can'* not '*book*'.

3.1.5 Non-Polar Questions and Answers

Non-polar question (WH-questions) or open question uses interrogative words (5Wh) include what, who, where, when, which, and how. There are ten questions and answers of non-polar questions used by teacher and students in EFL classroom dialogue at St. Joseph Junior High School Kupang. There are four out ten questions and answers which are presented below in text 10, text 11, text 12, and text 13.

Text 10
T   *: Who is absent today?*
Ss   *: Ihsan, Tessa*

Text 11
T   *: Why you cannot see something?*
Ss   *: Because our eyes is closed*

Text 12
T   *: Why?*
S*s*   *: dark.*

Text 13
T   *: How do you know that is a book?*
Ss   *: feel it*

These four questions and answers are the type of open questions or non-polar questions in which they are all use question of 5WH includes what, who, where, when, why and how. The question in text 10 *'Who is absent today'* uses the interrogative word 'what' which needs an answer of mentioning people's name *(ihsan, tessa)*.

Next, the question in text 11 *'Why you cannot see something?'* indicates a reason of students (you) when they cannot see anything. This question does not limit the students to answer it by certain words as polar questions have, the answer is flexible depends on the students' own reason. In text 12, the question *'why?'* is incorrect literally because it just expressed by a single word *'why'* without any other complements that should make this question to be clear. In contrary, this question is actually taken from oral dialogue so the question means why they (students) cannot see the book *(observation result).* That is why the students answer *dark*. These questions let the students answer freely according to what they experience.

The question in text 13 *'How do you know that is a book?'* is started by the interrogative word 'how' which needs a description of something how it occurs or happens in the circumstances of the topic. This question does not require fixed answer like a polar question or closed question that just requires an answer as *'yes'* or *'no'*.

3.2 Grammatical Errors of Questions and Answers

The grammatical errors of questions and answers in EFL classroom studied between teachers and students are focused on surface taxonomy which proposed by Dulay *et al.*, (1982), namely omission, addition, misformation and misordering (Dulay et al., 1982: 146). However, not all they are included here as the data shows that 'addition' is not found in our research. There are only omission, misformation and misordering errors found.

3.2.1 Omission

According to Dulay et al. (1982: 154), the omission is a type of errors which characterized by the absence of a part which must not include in a well-formed utterance. This type of grammatical error is mostly done by all second language learners including Indonesian students. This grammatical error also encountered by teacher and students in EFL Classroom dialogue at St. Joseph Junior High School Kupang. The omission errors in questions and answers given by teacher and students are displayed in text 14, as follows.

Text 14
T   : *Who is absent today?*
Ss   : *Ihsan, Tessa* (together)

The error of this question and answer in text 14 is *ihsan, Tessa*. The answer of the students just gives sort response by omitting some parts of a sentence so that the sentence is not a well-formed sentence. The answer should be '*they are Ihsan, Tessa, ...*'. The omission of this sentence is 1) it has no subject (they) and 2) it has no 'to be' (are). The same case of error can be seen in Text 15 as follows.

Text 15
T   : *Have you read the text?*
Ss   : *Yes*

Similar to question and answer in text 14 above, the question and answer in text 15 have some missing parts as well. The omission of the above question and answer is on answer *Yes* without any additional part as the complement of a yes-no question and answer. The answer should be in a well-formed sentence to *Yes we have* because the question is started by perfect (present) *Have*. So, the answer also must be started by having.
     Besides the above errors, the researcher presents a similar error in the following text 16 of question and answer phenomena in the EFL class.

Text 16
T   : *Can You see something?*
Ss   : *No*

The error of question and answer in text 16 is on the students' answer; *No*. This answer is incorrect because there is not complement which must be included in order to sentence or the utterance is well-formed used. The answer is given by students actually must be *No, we cannot*.

3.2.2 Misformation

     Misformation is a type of error characterized by the use of inappropriate forms of the morpheme or structure (Dulay, et, al, 1982: 160). There are two misformations errors found in the teacher and students' question and answer. The misformation errors are presented below in text 17 and text 18.

Text 17
T   : *What is write?*
Ss   : *Menulis*

The first error of this question and answer is *what is write?* This question was given by English teacher that is not complete or cannot be understood by readers or listeners because it is not well-formed structure. Actually, this question must be *what is the Indonesian of write?* Looking at the question above, the students cannot be blamed in answering unless they answer correctly. Text 18 shows the same case of an error made by the EFL teacher as presented below.

Text 18
T   : *what is writer?*
Ss   : *Penulis*

The error of this dialogue is on teacher's question *what is writer?* If we see the question syntactically, the question has meant what is the definition of a writer. Conversely, according to observation done, the teacher asks the students about the meaning of writer in Indonesian. Therefore, the correct form of the question is '*what the Indonesian meaning of writer is*'.

3.2.3 Misordering

Misordering is an error which ordered non-structurally in an utterance or in a sentence. This type of error is clearly defined by Dulay, et, al (1982: 162). It is a type of error that is characterized by incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of the morpheme in an utterance. Misordering error occurs once during the dialogue of teacher and students in EFL classroom. The error of misordering can be seen in the following text 19 of the question and answer phenomena in TEFL class.

Text 19
T   : *Why you cannot see something?*
Ss   : *Because our eyes are closed*

The error of this dialogue is a question given by teacher and students. The question '*why you cannot see something?*' is an error because the placement of modal auxiliary *cannot* is incorrect. As an interrogative sentence, this question structure should be Question word + modal auxiliary + S + V1 + O. Thus, the correct sentence of the question is *why you can't see anything*.

4. Conclusion

Despite the fact that English is a foreign language in Indonesia, that is, it is not used widely in everyday lives of Indonesian people, the language is widely taught and learned all over the country. In teaching and learning it, EFL teachers and their students use the language to express their ideas, feeling, complains, and many more purposes. The interaction can be also in forms of asking and answering questions between teachers and their students, among teachers and their students themselves as the focus of this research.

The type of questions and answers used by teacher and students in EFL classroom dialogue are limited on by purpose and by grammatical form questions. Then, by purpose questions are divided into three types, descriptive question, eg. *Why you cannot see something?* relational question, eg. *What does the famous mean?* and causal question, e.g. *can you see something?*. By grammatical form still divided intro two group; polar question e.g. *can you close your eyes?* and non-polar question, e.g. *what is the suitable question for the sentence?*

The grammatical errors of questions and answers used by teacher and students in EFL classroom dialogue. The errors of questions and answers given teacher and students are ommission, (*answer: yes, no, the story of Helen Keller),* misformation, e.g. *because our eyes is closed,* and misordering, e.g. *why you cannot see something?*

The teacher and students' way of giving questions and answers in EFL classroom dialogue, as teacher gives question to begin the class, teacher gives questions to lead the students to the topic of the material which is being taught, teacher mostly gives questions started by modal auxiliary can, teacher gives questions to check the understanding of the students, students answered their teacher with short answers, and students mostly answer the questions together.

In addition to those major findings, it is also interesting to point out here that the students and their teacher are not active in asking and answering questions in their EFL class. Our data indicate that most of the questions are produced by the EFL teacher, whereas his students literally asked no question at all. It is good that they answer most of their teacher's questions, yet they have no effort to ask him a question. It is also interesting to state here that the students mostly answer their teacher's questions collectively, not individually.

The question is why it happens or how we can motivate the students to be more active in asking questions and/ or answering their teacher's questions individually; questions that should be answered to make the students more successful in their learning, EFL or another school subject. This study, however, does not discuss the issues as they are not included in the topic of our research and discussion. Further research is, therefore, needed to tackle the issues, which we think, are important to develop students; critical and creative thinking, two ways of thinking necessary not only for an individual student's growth and success but also. Through those students, for a nation to develop better towards its destiny. It is crucial since a nation would never be well-developed if it has no critical and creative thinking habits.

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