STAGES AND ERROR ANALYSIS IN QUESTION FORMATION OF FIVE GRADER STUDENTS

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Abstract:
The present study aims to seek the stages of how young learners forming their questions. It is believed that in making the questions, learners are going trough several developments until they can create the question perfectly. Stages from Pienemann, Johnston & Brindley (1988) were used as the developmental classification of question formation. While Richards' (1973) Errors stages were used in analyzing the errors of question formation. Two students with different genders were taken as the participants with narration manuscripts as the data collection. The results were very surprising; both learners could perform complex question formations with only few errors. Though they are young learners, structuring a complex question seemed not difficult for them. However, the more difficult the question formats, the more errors the students made. They students commonly simplified the questions format, which made the formats sometimes, went wrong. From this interesting result, It is expected that this study can be an initial effort to conduct bigger and wider area of research in the future.

Keywords: *Question Formation, Development Stages.*

It is undeniable that the question formation is unable to be separated from language development. Researchers (e.g. Dulay et al, 1982; Pienemann, Johnston & Brindley 1988; Spada & Lightbown, 1999;) found that Language learners cannot skip from developmental stages in forming the questions.

Before the language learners master a new structure, they need to go through the previous stages (Dulay et al., 1982, p. 5). The stages of question formation were detected based on formulated construction of words and chunks. Dulay et al,. (1982) were the few of scholars who successfully created the stages of question formation. Pienemann and Johnston (1986, 1987) made the new invention of question formation stage from their empirical studies using two innovative research methods – "the emergence criterion and implicational scaling" – to examine stages in the development of questions (Pienemann, Johnston & Brindley 1988, p. 235). The emergence criterion is the method which is based on the acquisition of a question-type on one productive (that is, non-formulated) token. Language learners sometime use single words or units to ask, such as *what else? Next?.* Those non formulaic tokens are considered question. On the other hand, Implicational scaling is a procedure based on the rationale that 'if sample A contains rule 3, then it will also contain rules 2 and 1' (Pienemann 1998: 134). Meanwhile, Spada and Lightbown (1999) examined various learners' question formation stages to support and argue the previous scholars' studies. Lastly, Tarone and Liu (1995) raise the important issue of how the social context influences acquisition of formulating the questions.

Because question formation is a process of developing a language, it is highly possible for the learners to have imperfect structures. From the imperfect structures, the learners make an effort to progress their language development (Dulay et al, 1982, p.121). For that reason, errors can also be made by the learners during their question formation development. These errors are usually made because of the learners' ignorance to comprehend the rule strictly and thus they created the false concepts that produced the incorrect structures (Richards, 1973a, p.96). It is usually started from the simple word ignorance such as articles and preposition, and then it is continued with simplifying the rules of structure. It occurs because they think that using such rule is simpler and easier to construct.

Even though the scholars have agreed that the learners have stages

in structuring the questions, they had different results in finding the same decision of what stage dominated the learner in certain language proficiency and what stage comes after one stage appears. One of the examples was from Spada and Lightbown (1999). They argued that when the learners reached the *fronting yes/no question and wh- questions*, it was difficult for them to move the next stage, inversion of *yes/no and wh- questions* (p. 14). While Tarone and Liu (1995) identified that the learners could straightly produce the inversion of yes/no and wh- question, but it was possible for them not to understand the form of *fronting yes/no and wh- questions* (p.118).

Other Previous study was taken from Spinner and Grinstead (2006) in their cross-sectional study between Spanish and Catalan Students found that the formation of *wh- questions* were developed at the same time with other sentence structure such as *fronted objects* and *subcjects*. However, the late study from Almacioglu (2013) who employed an experiment of Preschool Turkish children's *yes/no question and wh- questions* formation, he found that children tended to master *yes/no question* earlier than *wh- questions* because it was easier for them to produce the first one than the late one. This confusion made other researchers difficult to choose the proper stages of question formation if they want to conduct similar studies.

Research Question

The present study examined the stages and errors in question formation made by the English language learners, particularly the young learners. It would be easier to examine young learners since their languages were mostly produced spontaneously ignoring the second thought of making mistake. Cross sectional study was used to report the dominant stages and errors made by the learners. The research questions were made as follows:

1. What is the most dominant stage in young learner's question formation?
2. What is the most occurred errors in young learner's question formation?

Limitation of Study

The study only focused on the stages taxonomy taken from Pienemann, Johnston & Brindley (1988) to find the dominant stage of question formation. While the error analysis dimensions was taken from Richards (1973). Richard taxonomy was used because the types of error analyzed from him were paralleled with the stages from Pienemann, Johnston & Brindley (1988). As the results, the findings would be a bit weak because it had a very limited and narrowed theoretical framework. There would be no other question formation stages taxonomy to be compared in this study since it too only one taxonomy to be used in this study.

Other weakness from the study was from the limitation number of the participant. The researcher only one student for the participant which made the findings of the study could not represent a whole linguistic phenomena.

Developmental Stages in Question Formation

Greater works have been made by the scholars in discovering the stages of question formation. Dulay et al. (1982) and Pienemann, Johnston & Brindley (1988) were few of them. Dulay and colleagues divided the stages into four types based on the structure of questions. The first stage occured when the learner placed a *wh-question* at the beginning of the sentence. In stage two, early auxiliaries such as *is, are* and *was* appeared as well as some modals such as *can* and *will*. In stage three, more auxiliaries were inverted in the structure including *do* and *does*. In the final stage, the rest of auxiliaries such as *has, been* and *am* were acquired and inverted with subjects (Dulay et al. 1982, p. 127).

More advanced stages were identified by Pienemann, Johnston & Brindley (1988). They divided the stages in to 6 dimensions. In general, they are single words, SVO word order, Fronting wh- and auxiliaries, Inversion wh- and auxiliaries, and tag questions. The table below is the complete version of developmental stages of question formation from Pienemann, Johnston & Brindley (1988).

Stage	Structure	Example
1a	Single words	Why? This? Scissor? Red?
1b	Single units	A boy? What else? What color?
2	SVO word order	The tea is hot?
3a	Fronting wh-	Do he work? What he is doing?
3b	Fronting do in yes/no questions	What the boy is throwing? Does he going home?
3c	Fronting other followed by uninverted sentence	Is he is mad? Is he have neighbor?
4a	Inversion: yes/no questions with auxiliary copula	Is he mad about that? So is he going to drive a car? Has he answer the phone?
4b	Inversion : wh- questions with modal	Can you draw the whole world?
4c	Inversion: wh- questions with copula (not aux)	What is this lady? Where are this place? Why is he surprised?
5a	Inversion: auxiliary (e.g. is) in 2nd position	Who is the woman who talk to the girl? Who's buying it? Why's he going outside?
5b	Inversion: do operator (e.g. does/do) in 2nd position	What she hold in her hand? What does she asking for?
5c	Inversion: Modal (e.g. may) in 2nd position	Who may be calling? Where will she take this?
6a	Tag question	You can't, can you?
6b	Negative question	Can't she come in?
6c	Embedded question	Can you tell me who he is?

(Adapted from Pienemann et al. 1988: 217-243)

In the first stage, the learner forms questions by using single words or single units. In the second stage, the constituents of a sentence are used in the right order. The third stage is called fronting, which is used in asking direct questions, where, for example *do-* and *wh-questions* are placed at the beginning of a sentence. Here, word-order phenomenon occurs in *wh-questions* with a copula, called pseudo-inversion (Roiha, 2008, p. 25), in which the learner inverts the copula and the subject. In the fourth stage, inversion also appears in *yes/no questions* in which the learner places the

auxiliary or modal in the front of the sentence. As the learner proceeds to the fifth stage, the auxiliary and modal verbs are placed in the second position in wh-questions, in the sixth and final stage, the learner is familiar with tag questions.

Errors in Question Formation

Studies also concerned with the errors made by the learners during their progress of forming the questions. Dulay et al. (1982) have classified errors into four categories: omission, addition, misinformation and misorderings (p. 150). Omissions occur when there is an item of pattern in a structure is missing. Typically omitted structures are grammatical morphemes such as inflections, articles, auxiliaries and prepositions. Additions take place when there is an item that should not appear in a pattern. Typical additional errors are double markings and regularization, in which the learner applies the rules in producing regular form to irregular forms, such as *see* becomes *seed* instead of *saw*. Misformation is the wrong form of a morpheme or a structure, such as *Me hungry*. Fourthly, Misorderings occur as a morpheme or a group of morphemes are placed incorrectly in an utterance, such as *What Daddy is doing.*

Older study of error analysis focusing on question formation was from Richards (1973). He found 5 error types of question formation commonly made by the learner. The types were not really different with Dulay and colleagues' (1982) errors dimensions. However, Richard added the combination of omission and inversion as part of question formation errors.

Error type	Examples
1. Omission of inversion	What was called the film? How many brothers she has? What she is doing? When she will be 15? Why this man is cold?

2. Be omitted before verb + ing	When Jane coming? What she doing? What he saying?
3. Omission of do	Where it happened? How it looks like? Why you went? How you say it in English? How much it costs?
4. Wrong form of auxiliary, or wrong form after auxiliary	Do he go there? Did he went? Do he comes from your village? Which road did you came by?
5. Inversion omitted in embedded sentences	Please write down what is his name. I told him I do not know how old was it. I don't know how many are there in the box.

(Adapted from Richards 1973, p. 112-113)

The first type occurs especially in *wh-questions*, which should be the of form *wh + SVO*. Here, inversion is omitted and thus either the verb or the subject is misplaced, such as *What she is doing?* The second error type is present in *wh-questions*, which should use the *structure wh + copula + ing*. However, *be* is omitted, like in *What he saying?* In the third error type *do* is omitted and therefore a correct form of *wh + do + SVO*. Question is not constructed, for example *Why you went?* A wrong form of the auxiliary do or the wrong verb form after auxiliary is the distinctive feature of the fourth error type, like in *Did he went?* The final error type includes the cases when inversion is omitted in embedded questions. (Richards 1973: 112-113).

METHOD

The Participant

The subject of the study was the students of elementary school grade five. Two students voluntarily joined in the study consist of a boy and a girl. Both of them are now students at BPK Penabur Elementary School. Their first language is Indonesia and English is their second language. They

commonly use English in school and their English course institution. They sometime have a conversation with their parents and sibling using English; however, it was not their routine habit to speak English in home. They both like English story and song, and thus it is possible for them to develop their English through their hobbies.

Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected at September 19, 2013 in BPK Penabur Elementary School in Grogol, Jakarta. The participants were first asked to see the narrative pictures without the story. After sometime, they were asked to have asking and answering session regarding with the story of the pictures. Note that, the researcher here was only giving them instruction without giving interference or assistance during the session. After they were ready, they were asked to decide which would be the one who ask and the one who answer the question. The boy was the questioner and the girl was gave the answer. During the session, the researcher video recorded their conversation. After the session ended, they were interviewed in order to get their background information.

Data Analysis Procedure

To analyze the data, the participants' conversation was first being transcribed a written form. After that, the questions from the boy were being sorted and combined. There were nine questions asked by the participant. Those questions were analyzed through question formation stages and error analysis using tables of analysis. Each of the questions was placed into the appropriate stages table and error questions are placed into the error table. In order to find the exact number of domination, percentage counting was used to find the dominate stage and errors in the question formation.

FINDINGS

The section contains the result from analysis of question formation stages and errors. In this finding, the domination of stage and error type was discovered using the total number of items and percentage.

Stages of Question Formation

The result showed that there were 9 questions made by the learner. The table of analysis indentified that the learner was capable to form the question structure until stage 5, inversion using *do* operator in 2nd position. It means that the learner was able to produce the question using wh-question added with auxiliary copula such as *what are they carrying?*

Stage	Structure	Number of Questions	Percentage (%)
1b	Single unit	1	11.1
2	SVO word order	1	11.1
3a	Fronting wh-	1	11.1
4a	Inversion: yes/no questions with auxiliary copula	3	33,3
5a	Inversion: auxiliary (e.g. is) in 2nd position	2	22,2
5b	Inversion: do operator (e.g. does/do) in 2nd position	1	11,1

The most significant number of stage made by the learner was from inversion using yes/no question with auxiliaries (stage 4). There were 3 questions (33%) from all questions categorized as stage 4. It means that the learner mostly used inversion in his questions. His question was mostly added with auxiliaries such as *were they trying to get the parrot?*. The second highest position of stages was from inversion using auxiliary in 2nd position. He made 2 questions from this stage (22,1%). One interesting phenomenon occurs in the result was that even though the learner has reached stage 5 in his question formation; he still made some question using simple structure such as single unit such as *flashlight or torch?,* ignoring the wh-question or yes/no structure, and SVO word order this is not completed such as *why the kid…?*.

Errors in Question Formation

During the forming of question, the learner could not avoid to make errors during his speech. The result showed that the learner made 2 errors

in his question formation.

Error type	Numbers of Error
1. Omission of inversion	1
2. Be omitted before verb + ing	-
3. Omission of do	1
4. Wrong form of auxiliary, or wrong form after auxiliary (Misformation)	-
5. Inversion omitted in embedded sentences	-

The two questions errors were omission of inversion such as *what it is?,* and omission of do such as *Why the kid…?.* Because there was only a little information about the errors from the detail point of view, the study provided the result from the more general view.

Error Types	Numbers of Error	Percentage (%)
Omission	2	22.2
Misformation	-	
Inversion & Omission	-	

It is clearly seen that the learner made error question formation mostly from omission. It took 22% from all question formations. It means, he sometime omit one item of the pattern such as *what it is* and *why the kid..?.* He did not make error in any other types of error. One interesting phenomena from the result was that even though the learner made the omission errors in his questions, the interlocutor did not have the difficulty to understand his questions. She could grasp the message of the question and gave the answer immediately.

DISCUSSION

Stages of Question Formation

From the result, it can be inferred that the most dominant stage of question structure that the learner formed was from omission. It supports the argument from Tarone and Liu (1995) that the learners could straightly produce the inversion of *yes/no* and *wh- question* (p.118). it was seen from nine questions the learners made, five of the were inversion of *yes/no* and *wh-questions.* However the study did not correspond to the theory from Spada and Lightbown (1999) who stated that when the learners reached the *fronting yes/no question and wh- questions*, it was difficult for them to move the next stage, inversion of *yes/no and wh- questions* (p. 14). The learner has reached stage 4 (inversion of *yes/no and wh- questions)* in his question formation, there is also a chance for him to made question from stage 3 (*fronting yes/no question and wh- questions).* As a whole, the study made one agreement from most theorists of question formation (e.g. Dulay, 1982; Pienemann, Johnston & Brindley 1988; Spada & Lightbown, 1999;) that even though the learner was able to structure question until stage 5, there was always possibility for him to go back to the previous stage. Here, he could even go back to the imperfect structure of question, single unit question format.

Errors in Question Formation

From the result, it can be inferred that the learners made errors mostly on omission. The result supports the argument from Richard (1973) that the most common errors in question formation were overgeneralization including simplification (p. 113). The learners tended to ignore the strict rules of the pattern and hypothesized the false concept of rules and made the incorrect structure. Here, he hypothesized it with simplifying the pattern and made it become an error.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the question formation has indeed developmental stages for the language learners who try to acquire it. Moreover, errors always

occur whenever the learners try to acquire the question formation. The most interesting phenomena about the stages in question formation is that even the young learners can be proficient in structuring the question. They can formulate the complex formation for only asking something. In this case, the participant could reach the stage 5 where he could invert his question with *do- operator.* In the future, they only need to learn more about the most difficult formation stage, tag question, during their language learning.

However, the more complex the learners produce of question formation, the higher possibility of error that the learners can make. Surprisingly, the participant only made a few errors in his questions. The most common error made by the learner was omission where he tried to simplify the pattern of question. It is possibly also the common problem made by the other language learners.

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APPENDICES

The questions made by the learner:

1. what it is?
2. What are they carrying?
3. flashlight or torch?
4. Why are they running?
5. are they really dumb?
6. Why the kid...?
7. Is he going to trip over?
8. Where did the criminals go?
9. Were they trying to get the parrot?

Table 1. Stages in Question Formation

Stage	Structure	Question number	The number of question	The percentage (%)
1a	Single words			
1b	Single units	3	1	11.1
2	SVO word order	6	1	11.1
3a	Fronting wh-	1	1	11.1
3b	Fronting do in yes/no questions			
3c	Fronting other followed by uninverted sentence			
4a	Inversion: yes/no questions with auxiliary copula	5, 7, 9	3	33,3
4b	Inversion : wh- questions with modal			
4c	Inversion: wh- questions with copula (not aux)			
5a	Inversion: auxiliary (e.g. is) in 2nd position	2,4,	2	22,2
5b	Inversion: do operator (e.g. does/do) in 2nd position	8,	1	11,1
5c	Inversion: Modal (e.g. may) in 2nd position			

6a	Tag question			
6b	Negative question			
6c	Embedded question			

Table 2. Errors in Question Formation

Error type	The questions
1. Omission of inversion	what it is?
2. Be omitted before verb + ing	
3. Omission of do	Why the kid...?
4. Wrong form of auxiliary, or wrong form after auxiliary	
5. Inversion omitted in embedded sentences	

Transcript of Matthew and Katriel

Note:

M: Matthew, the questioner

K: Katriel, the answer giver

M : Look, its nice story. And what it is?

K : I think there are criminal that already escape from the prison and one to go to the house. And kidnap a kid or take a pick or take their treasure thing.

M : Wow...What are they carrying?

K : I don't know. I'd just tell the buddy. They don't get anything.

M : No, this one

K : Oh, they are taking a flashlight

M : Look, flashlight or torch?

K : I think it's flashlight because if it is a torch it'll fire and this for light.

M : Ok. Why are they running?

K : because the flash light it was turned down and then they, the criminals are seed by the kid I guess.

M : No, maybe they, they're dumbs.

K   : Oh, because the flash light turn down and I think this loud. So, that they run.

M   : Ya, are they really dumb?

K   : What?

M   :I think they are dumb.

K   : Ya, they are stupid

M   : Why the kid...?

K   : I think aa… I think it going down a ladder. I think the kid listen from the flashlight out

M   : Ouh... is he going to trip over?

K   : No, I guess not, ooo... look at this.

M   : Yes, He open the room and there was nothing.

K   : Yeah

M   : Where did the criminals go?

K   : I think they have escape again and they're trying to another night and they just could go and take the precious thing I guess.

M   : Were they trying to get the parrot?

K   : I dont know maybe because it was a Dodo bird or something too precious

M   : Oh, maybe it's a golden Dodo bird.