Analysis of Interruptions in Classroom Group Discussions

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Abstract: Interruption is often seen as a negative gesture for someone to take the floor. However, through further research, it was proven that interruption can be used as a way to encourage and support other speakers in the conversation. With this, the research aims to determine the classifications and purposes of interruptions used in classroom group discussions and the factors that led these interruptions to take place. The data were gathered from the selected group of English and Filipino Majors through the use of audio and video recording devices. The conversations in group discussions were transcribed using Gumperz et al. (1993) transcription method which then were classified and interpreted through the classifications of interruption by Ferguson et al. (1977). Results showed that the participants' interruptions were mostly classified as cooperative/supportive in Filipino (L1) and silent in English (L2). Furthermore, there are myriads of reasons as to why students interrupt and some of these are to agree, to disagree or to contribute meaningfully in the discussion. This study is a part of the growing body of research on interruptions in the classroom; thus, allow teachers to construct ways to use group discussion to enhance students' fluency and utilization of L1 and L2.

Key Words: interruptions; English; Filipino; language; classroom setting

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Classrooms have been considered as the main arena where language learning occurs since learners learn through interpersonal interaction with their teacher and peers. With this, the method of teaching has been shifting from teacher-centered to student-centered and one of its features is on the use of collaborative discussions (e.g. pair and group work) which are conducted through taking turns and are comprised of interruptions.

Given these points, the study is significant for various reasons. First, the rationale of conducting the study is because in previous research, the focus is merely on identifying the dominant classifications of interruptions used in group discussions contextualized in an international; non-academic setting. As a result, the purposes of interruptions during classroom group discussions and the factors that led these interruptions to take place were left unexplored. Therefore, there is a need for further investigation to address this limitation based on Philippine context with English and Filipino languages as main variables of this research. With this, the study is a contribution to the growing body of language research. Second, the study will break the notions of the previous studies that interruptions are only used for negative purposes (e.g. for making disagreements). Henceforth, students will become aware on their interrupting behaviors during classroom conversations. Lastly, the study will provide teachers further understanding on interruptions; will allow them to utilize group discussions as a way to improve students' fluency on L1 and L2, and will teach students pragmatic competence especially on interruptions.

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1.2 Review of Related Literature

There are several studies that adhere to the definition of interruption as negative and one of which came from the study of Xu (2009). According to this study, interruption is often described as an unethical intention to cut the flow of the current speaker's speech and to seize the floor to express one's opposition. It is also said that interruption is a device to exercise power and control over a conversation (Zimmerman & West, 1975). However, according to Karpowitz and Mendelberg (2014), they defined interruption as a way of supporting the current speaker without depreciating that speaker's efficaciousness.

In the study of Ferguson (1977), Bazzanella (1994), Yang (2005), Cacioppo and Maroni (2004), interruptions can be classified as supportive/cooperative, obstructive, simple, butting-in, silent and failed interruption (refer to Table 1 for further information on the Classifications of Interruption).

There are many factors which affect the use of interruptions in a conversation. For this study, the focus will be on the three (3) different factors namely (1.2.1) gender, (1.2.2) language use and (1.2.3) roles in the group discussion.

1.2.1 INTERRUPTIONS AND GENDER

In previous researches, men are seen as interrupters while women are not.

As the definition of interruption evolves, the identity of interrupters also changes. In Stubbs (2014) who studied talk among friends within a chosen student organization found out that regardless of gender, interruptions happen equally despite findings from previous researches that men are interrupters while women are interruptees.

Furthermore, in the study of Robinson and Reis (1989), it was found that interrupters, regardless of sex, were seen as less sociable and more assertive than individuals who did not interrupt. In short, in contrast to beliefs that interruptions can be supportive, it was seen in this study that interruptions lead to negative personality attributions.

With the existence of researches proving that both genders can positively and negatively interrupt in a conversation, it is not sufficient to assume the identity of the interrupter based on gender. Rather, the use of language when making interruptions should be considered also as a basis to determine the interrupter in the conversation/discussion.

1.2.2 INTERRUPTIONS AND LANGUAGE USE

Different studies have shown how connected language and interruptions are.

According to Weinreich (1953), the speaker either speaks one language or the other. This claim was supported by the 'separation model' proposed by Dulay and Burt (1980) which says that there is no point of discussing the effects of L1 and L2 on each other since L1, L2 or foreign language of the speaker have different set of patterns and rules that do not share the same characteristics.

On the other hand, studies have shown that L1 is a significant medium for enhancing students' fluency and accuracy of their L2. The probable reason behind the students' preference of using L1 rather than L2 in their conversations is the fact that they are more comfortable in using the language (Al Sharaeai, 2012 & Shabir, 2017).

On the contrary, professionals (e.g. teachers) do question the use of L1 in an English classroom as it may become a barrier towards students' learning of other languages. Thus, it may result to students' lack of proficiency in their L2 and in other languages as well (Farzana, 2017).

With these researches arguing the effectiveness of L1 and L2 in a particular discourse, the commonalities behind these is the way a person uses the language when making interruptions have an impact to his or her roles in the group discussion.

1.2.3 INTERRUPTIONS AND ROLES IN GROUP DISCUSSION

With interruption embodying a negative definition of cutting the flow of a discussion, it is expected that it is connected to factors such as dominance, power and status (Eakins & Eakins, 1978, Zimmerman & West, 1975).

With dominance being associated with men, the study of Smith-Lovin and Brody (1989) strongly supports this hypothesis. Upon observation, it was revealed that in group discussions, men talk more and thus, often assume a leadership position through receiving more positive and fewer negative statements.

In contrast to this notion is the study of Ng, Dunne and Brooke (1993) whose research is on interruption and influence in group discussions, it was discovered that group members who gained more

turns by successfully interrupting others were perceived as more influential. Thus, it can be concluded that both men and women can become interrupters and can be perceived as influential.

1.3 Research Questions

Adopting the methods of the previous research, this study aims to compare and classify turn taking strategies, specifically interruptions, between English and Filipino Majors. This aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is/are the dominant or evident classification/s of interruption used in classroom group discussions of English and Filipino Majors?

2. Is there a significant difference of interruptions used in classroom group discussions between English and Filipino Majors?

3. What are the factors that affect the interruptions used in classroom group discussions of English and Filipino Majors?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study is under a quantitative-qualitative research approach.

2.2 Research Setting

In the study, the data was collected from a state university in Taft Avenue, Manila on January 2018. The university is one of the oldest institutions in the Philippines who cater future educators in all fields and one of which is the field of languages: Filipino and English.

2.3 Participants

A total number of 41 third year college students were asked to join as participants of the study. The participants chosen in the study are all specializing in language (either English or Filipino). The criteria for the qualified participants relied on their level of language expertise and availability. The Filipino Majors' group is comprised of 24 students (19 females & 5 males) while the English Majors' group

has 17 students (14 females & 3 males). The age of the participants ranges from 18-23 years. All participants must have at least ten years of formal English and Filipino instruction in their primary and secondary education and have at least two years in their majorship.

2.4 Instrumentation and Materials

Before conducting the study, through formal letters, we secured permission from both of the university administration and the participants. For the data gathering, a session was done for both English and Filipino Majors. Every session comprising the group discussions was about 15 to 20 minutes and was recorded with audio and video recording devices. To ensure audibility of the data, the recording devices were tested beforehand and were placed away from possible interferences.

Thereafter, the data were transcribed following the Standard Transcription proposed by Gumperz et al. (1993).

After the data gathering, the researchers then conducted a short interview on both majors through selected members of the groups to gain knowledge on the groups' lead speakers.

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

To accomplish the study's objectives, the 41 language majors have undergone class observation while having a group discussion with their peers. With recording devices at hand, the group discussions have been recorded to serve as an authentic data of the study.

To dismiss the participants' uneasiness of being recorded, the researchers asked them to have a regular conversation with their peers with utmost assurance that the recorded conversations will not affect any of their academic records.

Beforehand, both parties were oriented on the implementation of the study and followed the same data collection procedure.

2.6 Method of Analysis

The researchers' preference of developing their own transcripts as transcription is regarded as an analysis within the perspective (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). With this, the interruptions are classified as seen on this table.

Table 1. Classifications of Interruption

Supportive/ Cooperative Interruption	Speakers A and B can be both in a simultaneous discourse or otherwise and there is an absence of Speaker B's intention to take the turn.
Obstructive Interruption	Speaker A is interrupted by Speaker B to make one's disagreement.
Simple Interruption	Speaker A is interrupted in the middle of the utterance in which Speaker A drops out while Speaker B completes the turn.
Butting-in Interruption	Speaker A is interrupted in the middle of the utterance but he or she completes the turn, while the interrupter does not.
Silent Interruption	Speaker A pauses in the middle of the sentence and Speaker B comes in instead of waiting for Speaker A to continue. According to Ferguson (1977), it is called Silent Interruption because there is no simultaneous speech involved.
Failed Interruption	Speaker B wants to take the turn and yet, Speaker B hesitated to take the turn.

(Ferguson, 1977; Bazzanella, 1994; Cacioppo and Maroni, 2004 as cited in Maroni, Gnisci, and Pontecorvo, 2008)

In order to answer RQ2, the researchers consulted a statistician to calculate the significant difference of the results between English and Filipino Majors using T-Test.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section is arranged according to the research questions mentioned in the first section of this paper.

3.1 Dominant classifications of interruption used by English and Filipino Majors

Table 2. Number of Interruptions

Classifications of Interruption	Filipino Majors	English Majors
Supportive/ Cooperative	129	53
Obstructive	25	15
Simple	43	29
Butting-in	48	27
Silent	69	60
Failed	2	3
Total	316	187

In Table 2, the dominant classification of interruption used by English Majors is silent interruption while Filipino Majors mostly used supportive/cooperative interruption. On the other hand, both majors used failed interruption the least in their group discussions.

Silent interruption is dominantly used in the English Majors' group discussions. According to Bachman and Palmer (1996 & 2010), speakers tend to pause in the conversation to think, to compose sentence and to check grammatical errors before speaking in the discussion.

On the contrary, supportive/cooperative interruption is dominantly used in the Filipino Majors' group discussions. Since the Filipino Majors used their L1, it is easier for them to explain their points and ideas even in a complicated topic because they are comfortable in using the language (Al Sharaeai, 2012). The use of supportive interruption is not only limited to one-word responses (e.g. "yes") but these can be ideas that will either support or enhance what the speaker said in the discussion.

For the failed interruption, it was the least used interruption in both majors' group discussions since the topics assigned, regardless of its level of difficulty, did require different ideas from various group members which are then, needed to be discussed and agreed upon as a whole.

3.2 The significant difference between the interruptions of English and Filipino Majors

The test result shows that there is no significant difference in the interruptions used by both majors. In Table 2, it was shown that the two most used interruptions are supportive/cooperative and silent. According to Weinreich (1953), the L2 user either speaks one language or the other. This is supported by the 'separation model' (Dulay & Burt, 1980) which sees no point on discussing the effects of L1 to L2 or vice versa. Both languages, the L1 (Filipino) and L2 (English), might be similar because these languages are governed by the same constraints and potentials as any other language acquired by human beings that led to the same interruptions used with either L1 or L2 (Cook, 2002b).

3.3 Factors that affect the interruptions of English and Filipino Majors

3.3.1 Gender

Table 3. Number of Interruptions

Classification of Interruptions	Filipino Majors		English Majors	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Supportive/ Cooperative	34	95	9	44
Obstructive	7	18	4	11
Simple	11	32	8	21
Butting-in	31	17	11	16
Silent	23	46	17	43
Failed	0	2	1	2
Total	106	210	50	137

In Table 3, it shows that the most commonly used interruption by men and women was the supportive/cooperative interruption while the least commonly used interruption was the failed interruption wherein the speaker simply failed to disrupt the other speaker's speech.

In the results, it was shown that supportive/cooperative interruption is used frequently in the group discussions. This is probably due to an almost homogeneous nature of the groups since there are more women than men. According to Smith-Lovin and Brody (1989), such supportive and topic-continuing interruptions are more likely to succeed in a single-sex context.

3.3.2 Language Use

Based from the results, it was shown that regardless of the language used in a group discussion, both majors frequently used supportive/cooperative and silent interruption to contribute ideas in their group discussions.

In addition, L1 and L2 indeed conduct the flow of their group discussions in a way where the speaker uses either of the two languages; other members in the group will either positively or negatively respond to what the speaker said due to their complete understanding of his or her statement.

3.3.3 Roles in Group Discussion

The extract reveals that men tend to commence and manage the flow of a group discussion.

Extract 1. Group Discussion of Filipino Majors (regarding their suggestions for an upcoming performance)

> Joey: ano game na? game na ba?
> diba meron tayong chat na pang grupo tapos ang una kasing suggestion ay yung tula ni ano ni… patricio… tapos kaso nga lang kapag nag ano kapag… yun yung ginamit baka parang interpretative na pagbigkas yung mangyari sa ano…

In Extract 1, it shows that Joey started their discussion by reminding the other members on what tasks they need to accomplish.

In a group discussion, males have a tendency to talk more and often claim a leadership position (Smith-Lovin & Brody, 1989). Therefore, in Extract 1, it was observed that Joey acted as the leader that negotiates and feeds the group with suggestions. Most likely, the group may agree, disagree, clarify or ask the one that controls the discussion.

Despite the fact that a male participant named Joey is the one who assumed leadership, it does not seem that his interruptions offend any of the group members, but rather they were more encouraged to take part in the discussion.

I: Whenever he interrupts in the discussion, do you feel intimidated by him or do you feel even more encouraged to participate in the group discussion?

R1: I feel encouraged to participate in the group discussion.

R2: He makes me feel like I have to talk and share something in (the) discussion. If he could do well in group discussions, I believe I could (do) it also.

However in the group discussions, men are not the only ones who can lead and thus, be influential but does so women.

I: Do you see her as an influential person, especially in a group discussion? Why?

R4: Yes, her directness and authority is highly influential because of her character…

Based on the interviews done to further explain the data, it was shown that the person who interrupts more in the group discussion, his or her contributions are seen as significant in comparison with the other group members that have fewer to none interruptions.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The results suggest that the dominant interruptions used by English and Filipino Majors are influenced by different factors such as gender, language use and roles in a group discussion.

It is also proven in the study that both men and women can become interrupters. This is because women are more likely to perform like men to accommodate them in the conversation.

The research is limited to a sample of L1 (Filipino) and L2 (English) students' interruptions in a classroom setting and in a specific university in the Philippines. The number and time of the sessions, including the topics used in the group discussions are added limitations of the study.

There can be a further research on the gender of the speakers, the length of utterances, and the grammatical structure of the interruptions produced by the students.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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