CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

5.1. Conclusions

To answer the first research question, this study has found out that the teaching techniques that the teacher predominantly employed in the classes were form-focused instruction, both planned and incidental and personalization techniques.

The teacher used focus-on-form instruction (FFI) the most, which falls within the communicative framework since the lessons are not grammar-based but still theme-based. The planned FFI was the instructional type asked for by the coursebook, with enriched input meant to present learners with the grammar but with primary attention to meaning; and focused communicative tasks. This technique was employed in a partially communicative way, because not all the lessons moved on to the communicative phase where the focused communicative tasks would be expected to be carried out.

Incidental FFI was both carried out explicity and implicitly but more often, explicitly. The teacher employed elicitation and metalinguistic feedback the most, among the types of explicit incidental FFI. With the exception of explicit correction, incidental FFI techniques were carried out in communicative ways as they allowed the students to communicate meaningfully using the correct forms.

Another technique the teacher used abundantly was personalization, generating interaction between teacher and students thus making the lesson more communicative. However, this did not occasion extensive talk on the part of the students.

The teacher also used inductive techniques in presenting grammar, presenting models of the target grammar mostly within texts and asking the students to derive the rules then making them apply it in guided communicative tasks.

Other techniques that the teacher carried out in the course of presenting, reinforcing or practicing grammar were conversations with students as well as rule explanation usually as review when there was general confusion with a particular grammar item among the students. She also carried out schema-activating tasks through the conversations she did with the students, or other activities specified in the coursebook such as pre-questioning.

To answer the second research question, observation results have shown that the activities were integrated into the four language skills. Although the teacher provided a lot of occasions to speak to practice the target grammar, these tasks were more often controlled.

The listening and reading tasks were accompanied by worksheets which contained fill-in-the-blanks exercises, matching exercises, comprehension questions, ordering exercises, and meaningful drills that made the students engage with the texts. Writing activities were also conducted using certain genre (e-mail) or more controlled writing exercises that again aided comprehension. The students also had peer correction once and engaged in pair work.

The results showed the successful integration of grammar teaching within communicative approaches. Sufficient attention was given to both meaning and form, and grammar was tackled within meaningful contexts. In some instances, grammar practice also generated interaction whether between the teacher and the students, and among the students, as well as between the student and the texts. However, it can also be seen from the results that some of the techniques the teacher used did not fully conform with the communicative approach. There was a large tendency for the classes to be teacher-led. One manifestation was the more abundant use of reactive incidental FFI over pre-emptive; and the use of explicit negative feedback over the implicit. It was seen from previous studies that these FFI techniques may lessen negotiation typical of communication as well as attention to meaning. This implies that toleration of errors can be increased in this particular class as this is more characteristic of CLT. This does not mean accuracy will be neglected. It only means not to overdo negative feedback as this may also hinder fluency which is part of communicative competence. Here, a balance between accuracy and fluency instruction is called for. Another manifestion is the lack of collaborative tasks in the classroom such as pair work in the form of role play, information gap and problem-solving tasks. Peer correction was also not employed in full, allowing the teacher to maintain her role as the model of correct speech. It was also noted that speaking tasks were more controlled with not much transition to freer speech production that would develop fluency. This may be one direction that this teacher can take in her future classes which means more effort to design speaking activities.

This shortcoming may be due to the position of English in Indonesia being an EFL country. It is a finding related to past researches about the implementation of CLT in EFL context discussed in chapter 2. In the EFL context, a fully communicative approach cannot be fully had because of the lack of need for English in daily life, lack of teacher competence, as well as the other pressing educational policy needs (Fotos, 1998; Lie, 2004; Musthafa, 2001; Subekti, 2010). In this case however, the teacher was proficient enough in English since she uses it also outside teaching. She also has sufficient experience and knowledge in English teaching. However, perhaps because of the other factors mentioned, the teacher still tended to conduct less communicative activities and focused more on structure. Moreover, in

Asian settings, the teacher is still always the source of knowledge (Chung, 2005; Karavas-Doukas in Oszevik, 2010), thus a learnered-centered approach such as the CLT (Richards, 2006; Savignon, 2002) may not completely work out (Liu, 2010; Chung, 2005). Furthermore, studies by Fotos & Nassaji (2001) have shown that a purely communicative model did not improve language proficiency. Thus, it is important that form-focused instruction take place in the CLT classroom, such as the case in the class observed. There was no exclusive focus on either meaning or form alone. Rather, form-focusing was done within communicative or quasi-communicative activities. But there is indeed a growing recognition that teaching English for communicative purposes is still the appropriate approach even in EFL contexts because language is a tool for communication and CLT directly aims to improve communicative competence (Yalden, 1987). This ties in with what Savignon & Wong (2003) and Savignon (1991) claim that knowledge of forms is insufficient and that learners need to be able to negotiate meaning in communication.

To answer the third research question, a speaking task was assigned to the students wherein they were supposed to make use of the past time expressions. While the students were able to convey meaning, they scored low in the grammar being tested as they tended to use the present tense even when referring to a past action, and their use of the present perfect was still flawed most of the time. In fact, the incidence of use of present perfect was very low. This could be due to the fact that the present perfect form is a late-tense emergence and that acquisition of this form would still take long. This therefore took away from the clarity of the meaning because of the ambiguous use of the tenses. The students were therefore not able to communicate so successfully due to the still poor assimilation of the grammar that they had been taught which could also be due to the lack of speech production tasks in the class. Two students who use English more in their daily life such as for internet and reading based on their profile, were able to communicate better as they made less grammatical errors. The use of English outside class hours makes these students achieve communicative competence better compared to their peers whose use of English is limited.

5.2. Suggestions

This section will deal with two types of suggestions – one is about suggestions for further studies and for improving the research; while the other one is suggestions for English teachers in general as can be learned from the results of the this research.

5.2.1 Suggestion for Future Studies

This study was a qualitative case study whose aims were mostly descriptive. It made use of observation but did not get to triangulate observation findings with in-depth interview. The researcher could only interpret causes for behaviors based on theories and past findings. Therefore, whether the teacher used the techniques with a communicative intention, that is, for the purpose of generating interaction with and among the students, and if she used those techniques with an explicit awareness of their theoretical principles of CLT, cannot be fully accounted for. Thus, one recommendation for a similar study in the future is to validate observation data with in-depth interview or focus group discussions to see into the motives and perceptions of the teacher and the behavior of students.

Another suggestion would be to observe lessons that focus on early-emergence grammar item such as the present tense, or an easier grammar item such as articles, or comparative adjectives in order to make the findings more realistic. Although, based on the English use and needs of the students (study or work abroad and to communicate on a daily basis), this grammar item would surely be important, it was far too early to assess their assimilation of this form. In this research the grammar item could not be pre-selected due to the purposive sampling done by the researcher as well as the timing of the observation. The researcher had to comply with lessons that were planned for the period of observation. This was another limitation of the study.

The study was also more of exploratory, and only sought to find out which techniques are used in teaching grammar, particularly the present perfect, in a language course in Surabaya and if this approach was effective as shown by the communicative performance of the students in a speaking task. Having found out the techniques and activities in this language course, several other questions come to mind that are worth studying subsequently. The first would be the reasons why the teacher handled the class with such procedures, or techniques and activities, especially, the reactive FFI, or why she did not proceed with communicative phase. Was it deliberate or unintentional? The second question would be the effectiveness of form-focused instruction. Experimental studies have been done abroad that tended to focus on short-term effects. Findings have been contradictory and it would be worth conducting several experimental type researches in the context of Indonesia to see

more consistency. The other option would be the observational type of research that would not measure short-term effects as these may not be that reliable, nor study the instructional strategies, but the process of acquisition of learners by looking at their interlanguage, given FFI (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). It would also be interesting to study which FFI worked better for students, and given which conditions such as developmental level and the intensity of application. Comparative studies of types of FFI employed are also worth looking into. For example, one group can be given more Planned FFI while another can be given more Incidental FFI. It would be interesting to see which group would perform better in accuracy and in fluency. Lastly, the study also gives rise to possible questions on how much negative feedback can be given in class, how they can be given and with what grammar items they are most effective, relating this to previous studies on error correction such as by Lyster and Ranta (1997).

Other experimental studies can also be done that tackle the effectiveness of one technique over another for teaching specific grammar forms to make the study more focused. But then Purpura (2004) argues that experimental studies are too many-faceted to seek simple answers such as which is the better method to teach grammar.

Pedagogical techniques have then become more recommendable as objects of study. Researchers have sought to explain L2 grammar learning from the techniques that have been employed and how these have led learners to process the language, such as in the case of this study, although in a limited way. Purpura (2004) suggests it is important to understand the processes of language acquisition and to know at which stage of the process they need help in. This can be made compatible with the claim of Bardovi-Harlig above.

In-depth observational studies may also be conducted on each of the specific techniques such as guided discovery, genre analysis, and peer correction.

It would also be interesting to conduct a comparative case study method wherein one class observed uses FFI while the other uses the traditional drilling method or a fully communicative syllabus, without much focus on grammar, and see the indicators of the success of the techniques.

6.2.2 Suggestions for English Teachers

This study was a descriptive observational case study on how grammar is taught in communicative ways. It was seen that the use of FFI was domininant in this class with other techniques sparsely employed. Although FFI has been largely recommended by a number of studies mentioned by Nassaji and Fotos (2007), the success of the FFI instructional type was not really reflected in the performance of the students in the speaking task given them. There are many factors to this, and this research does not attempt to make an analysis of these factors. One factor was mentioned which was the late emergence of the grammar in focus. But this is only one of them. Another may be the way the classes were designed, with a lot of FFI, input-based activities and mostly controlled speaking activities. Whatever may have been the other contributing factors to the student's poor performance in the use of the grammar they learned, the CLT directive mentioned in chapter 2 that accuracy tasks have to be balanced with fluency tasks still holds. While engaging the students in communicative tasks, some attention to form has to be present. But the reverse is also true. Focus on form has to be contextualized in meaningful or communicative tasks. Grammar teaching has to be integrated in a variety of formats as in Planned FFI, and not only when the need arises as in the case of Incidental FFI which was the most abundant in the class observed. Such integration would favor development of both accuracy and fluency. It can also take form in different class plans with a lot of communicative tasks that make the students interact while attending to both form and meaning. One must also take into account that FFI may work for acquisition of some grammar items, or for learning certain skills, but may not work on others as claimed by Long (1991), Long and Robinson (1998), Lightbown & Spada (1999) and Ellis (2001) in Chapter 2.

In this sense, error toleration plays a role in order to forego some incidental FFI and make the students focus too on fluency (Savignon, 2002). There is also a need to vary the strategies of negative feedback in order for these to suit the developmental level of the learner. The favorability of implicit incidental FFI has already been mentioned. However, while it is true that negative feedback should be given to students, this should not be overdone. Ellis and Sheen (2011) say that there are no simple rules of thumb in giving this feedback but Ur (1996 in Ellis and Sheen, 2011) states that it would be better to invest time in avoiding errors than in correcting them. This may imply more pre-emptive FFI or more Planned FFI.

The results of the study also recommend a defined move from controlled production tasks to less controlled production tasks. In the case observed, input-based techniques and controlled activities were given priority in terms of lesson design (reading, listening) (fill in the blanks, matching exercises, modelled speech production). These were seen to be more favorable to the students in terms of the retention of forms and the motivation of the students based on the way they applied the grammar and their responsiveness during these activities. However, these controlled activities have to prepare the students for more communicative tasks. As suggested by Pekoz (2008), Rojas (2006), Sysoyev (1999) and Ai Hwa Chen (2001), lessons can begin with a more controlled pre-communicative phase and then proceed to a communicative phase where the students apply the grammar rule. Thus, in a CLT context, one can start with meaningful texts, highlight the target grammar, proceed to a more controlled communicative activity, and then move on to freer language production. This latter can be role play, presentations, reporting, storytelling, and the like. Many coursebooks are designed in this way, and teachers may also gather a lot of ideas from the internet.

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