
An Analysis of Questions Used by an English Teacher in Classroom (A Case Study at the 10th Grade of SMA Al-Yasini Pasuruan 2011/2012)

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Abstract

This descriptive-qualitative study was aimed at investigating the question types employed by an English teacher and the purposes of the questions asked by the teacher in the classroom. The data were obtained by audio-recording and note-taking the three meetings of English subject, as well as by interviewing the teacher. The English teacher and her thirty six students were involved as the participants. The types of question were identified using the theory proposed by Brown (2007). It was found that the teacher used six out of seven question types; they were: knowledge, comprehension, application, inference, analysis, and synthesis questions. Furthermore, knowledge questions were highly employed by the English teacher and used to elicit factual answers, recall tests, recognize information, and check students' understanding. It was concluded that there were several factors that might influence the use of certain types of question: the objectives of lesson, the variety of tasks, and the teacher's purposes in asking questions.

Keywords: Interaction; Teacher Question; Teacher's Purposes; Types of Question.

1. Introduction

The demand for English proficiency at schools in Indonesia requires English language teachers to establish interactive classroom. The interactive classroom is the result of mutual interaction between teachers and students, students and students, group discussions, and any other classroom participation (Long&Sato as cited in Shomoossi, 2004: 98). It is of significance because through interaction, students can increase their language store, have opportunity to understand and use the language that is incomprehensible, help (foreign) them learn the target language easily and quickly (Brock, 1986; Liu&Zhao, 2010).

Teacher questions could be a way to establish the interaction within the classroom. Brown (2007: 169) suggested that one of the best ways of teacher being an initiator and sustainer of interaction is by employing questioning strategies. Additionally, Suk-a-nake, Heaton, Chantrupanth, and Rorex (2003: 32) reported that the use of questions with various types of question benefits classroom interaction.

A number of studies have also been conducted to investigate types of question frequently used by teachers in classroom. Wu (1993) investigated the question types used by four English teachers in Hong Kong. It was found that three of the teachers, surprisingly, used more referential questions than display questions. Shomoossi (2004) conducted his study in Iran and revealed that more display questions were used by the English teachers. David (2007) supported Shomoossi's findings. He found that the teachers in twenty secondary schools in Nigeria highly employed display questions than referential questions.

Since the results of studies on this topic have not been conclusive, the study about the question types used by teachers in classroom should be conducted in different contexts, such as Indonesian classroom. The writer, hence, was interested in investigating the types of question used by an English teacher and also purposes of the questions used by the English teacher in classroom in Indonesia.

The study was conducted in SMA Al-Yasini, Pasuruan because this school has a special class namely excellent class in the 10th grade where the English teacher speaks mostly in the target language. The study focused on the questions asked in English, assuming that the students would

respond in the target language which would give them opportunity to practice their speaking skills. This study was guided by the two following questions:

1. What types of question are used by the English teacher in the 10th A class of SMA Al-Yasini Pasuruan?
2. What are the purposes of the questions used by the English teacher in the 10th A class of SMA Al-Yasini Pasuruan?

This study aims at describing types of question used by the English teacher in the 10th grade of SMA Al-Yasini, Pasuruan and also discovering the purposes of the questions asked by the English teacher in the 10thA class of SMA Al-Yasini, Pasuruan.

The result of this study may encourage English teachers to employ certain types of question that help students to engage in mutual interaction within classroom, which in turn can lead to the progress of students' language learning. Furthermore, the writer expects that this study could give contribution to the knowledge of English language teaching in Indonesia. Also, it is hoped that the study would give additional reference to the development of English teaching methods particularly in Indonesia and to further research with similar topic.

2. Methodology

To achieve the aims of the study, the writer used qualitative approach. According to Bogdan and Taylor (as cited in Moleong, 2006: 4), qualitative approach is an approach yielding descriptive data in form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior. As this study aims at investigating observable behavior of teacher asked some questions to the students in the classroom, the qualitative approach is suitable for it. Audio-recording, note-taking, and interview were employed to investigate the questions types and the teacher's purposes in asking questions.

The observation was conducted three times in April 12th and 21st and May 12th 2012. The class lasted for 80 minutes per meeting. The writer carried out the observation personally by sitting on the back from beginning to the end of the class. The audio-recorders were placed in two spots: one was in front near the teacher and the other one was on the back. During the observation, the writer also took notes on teacher questions. The note-taking was employed to make a cross-check with the data taken from audio-recording. Additionally, the interview by means of audio-recording was conducted to obtain the teacher's purposes in asking certain types of question.

After data collection, the writer transcribed the audio data orthographically. Then, the writer did analysis on the data. There were three steps of the data analysis. First, the writer classified types of questions in first, second, and third meeting using Brown's theory of types of question (2007). The classified data was put into separate tables according to the seven types of question. Second, the transcription from the interview was used as data to identify the purposes of teacher questions. Finally, the writer drew conclusion of the whole data.

The participants of the study were an English teacher and her thirty six students. They belong to 10th A class of SMA Al-Yasini, Pasuruan. This school was chosen because it has a special class namely excellent class in the 10th grade. Excellent class is a special class consisting selected students. The students have high academic achievement compared to other students from other classes.

The participants were selected after discussion with the English teacher and the availability of time. The two classes have similar characteristics in their academic ability. Also, the same teacher teaches English in both classes. Therefore, it would not be a matter in choosing either one of the two excellent classes.

The writer, then, observed the 10th A class. The students' age ranges between 15-16 years old. The teacher is 34 years old and has 7 years of teaching experience. The language of instruction during English subject is mostly in English. The question types that the writer observed were the ones only spoken in English. This class, hence, is suitable with one of the aims of the study which is to investigate the types of question asked by the English teacher in the target language.

3. The types of question and the teacher's purposes in asking questions

From the analysis of transcription, it was found that the teacher performed six out of seven types of question proposed by Brown (2007); they are: knowledge, comprehension, application, inference, analysis, and synthesis questions. The following shows the frequency of the question types in the first, second, and third meeting the table:

No	Types of Question	Frequency						Total (per type)	
		First meeting		Second meeting		Third meeting			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Knowledge	60	83.3	63	56.8	58	87.9	181	72.7
2	Comprehension	7	9.7	37	33.3	8	12.1	52	20.9
3	Application	-	-	4	3.6	-	-	4	1.6
4	Inference	-	-	2	1.8	-	-	2	0.8
5	Analysis	-	-	4	3.6	-	-	4	1.6
6	Synthesis	5	7	1	0.9	-	-	6	2.4
7	Evaluation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total (per meeting)		72	100	111	100	66	100	249	100

Table 1: The frequency of question types

From the table above, it could be seen that knowledge questions were the most frequently used by the English teacher. The teacher applied 60 knowledge questions out of 72 questions in the first meeting, 63 knowledge questions out of 111 questions in the second meeting, and 58 knowledge questions out of 66 questions in the third meeting. The total of knowledge questions used in the three meetings is 181 questions from 249 questions asked.

Table 1 also shows the use of comprehension questions that emerged 7 times in the first meeting, 37 times in the second meeting, and 8 times in the last meeting. The total of comprehension questions employed is 52 questions. In addition, synthesis questions were used in the first and second meeting with the total of 6 questions. The teacher employed 5 synthesis questions in the first meeting and only 1 synthesis question in the second meeting.

Furthermore, the table 1 displays the use of application, analysis, and inference questions. Application and analysis questions accounted for 4 questions each, while inference question accounted for 2 questions. Inference questions were the question types used least by the teacher. These three types of question only appeared in the second meeting.

These findings are in line with previous studies, for instance: Shomoossi (2004) and David (2007). Shomoossi (2004) investigated 40 reading comprehension classes in Tehran University, Iran. He revealed that the teachers asked display questions more frequently than referential questions. Similarly, the study by David (2007) in 6 randomly secondary schools in Oyo and Osun state, Nigeria found that the teachers highly employed display questions compared to referential questions.

Despite the fact that this present study uses Brown's theory of question types, its findings are still in accordance with the two previous studies of display and referential questions. It is because the seven types of question proposed by Brown (2007) range from display to referential questions. The referential questions cover inference, analysis, evaluation and synthesis questions; while display questions include knowledge, comprehension, and application questions (Cohen et al., 2004). The difference lies on the cognitive level of each question. Display questions are considered lower-level questioning while referential questions are regarded as high-level questioning (McNeil, 2010).

From the analysis of findings as mentioned above, it was found that the teacher highly used display, in this case knowledge questions, in every meeting observed. In the first meeting, for instance, the objective of lesson was that the students were able to understand vocabularies about parts of body. The activity of class, thus, was to discuss the assignment from workbook "Look Ahead" about matching pictures of parts of body with numbers together with the whole students.

Short answers in form of numbers were required. Excerpt 1 shows the use of knowledge questions in the first meeting.

Excerpt 1

(A119) T : Let's see. *Arm is number?*

(A120) Ss : Ten.

In the second meeting, the objective of lesson was that the students were able to describe animals, find antonyms of certain words, skim descriptive texts, and translate vocabulary from English into Indonesian. Thus, the classroom activity was to check answers of mid-semester test covering: animal's description, antonyms, descriptive texts, and translations. And in the last meeting, the objective of lesson was that the students were able to describe a person and to present the description of a person in front of the class. She asked the students questions concerning how to describe physical features of distinct people.

Viewing from all of objectives of lesson in the three meetings observed, it was inevitable for the teacher to use more knowledge questions to check students' understanding of the entire topic discussed. Furthermore, display questions are usually used for comprehension checks, confirmation check, or clarification requests (Shomoossi, 2004: 98; David, 2007: 128). It was found that the English teacher frequently used knowledge questions to check students' understanding (see excerpt 1). In addition, this type of question is employed to elicit factual answer (see excerpt 2), recall tests (see excerpt 3), and recognize information (see excerpt 4) (Brown, 2007). Here are some examples of knowledge questions.

Excerpt 2

(B357) T : Do we have any lake here in Pasuruan?

(B358) Ss : No. Yes. Yes. Yes. Ranu.

Excerpt 3

(A386) T : What is the name of the dog that we discuss on page 115?

(A387) Ss : Volvo.

Excerpt 4

(C224) T : Okay, if you are telling about your father. *What do you call it?* Singer, professor?
What do you call it in English?

(C225) Ss : Career. Job.

In the interview, the teacher also stated that asking questions was important to ensure that the students understood what the teacher explained before. Hence, it is good to ask questions after teacher's explanation. Her purpose of asking questions to the students is in line with one of question purposes suggested by Cohen et al. (2004), which is to discover if students understand what is going on. The teacher's purpose in questioning manifested in the type of question that she mostly employed, which was knowledge questions, usually used for checking students' understanding.

Furthermore, comprehension questions were the second question types frequently used by the teacher. Such questions appeared in every meeting and were used to translate words or phrases from Indonesian to English or vice versa. Comprehension questions are used to translate, interpret and extrapolate (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill & Krathwohl, 1956: 89; Brown, 2007: 172). Excerpt 5 shows the use of comprehension questions.

Excerpt 5

(A262) T : What is arrogant?

(A263) Ss : *Sombong*.

The teacher asked many questions regarding translations because students' knowing equivalent words in respective language was important. Based on the interview, the teacher asked comprehension questions to increase students' vocabulary in the target language. Hence, the students can comprehend reading text well and can do well in the National Exam since reading is the main skill tested in the exam.

Inference, application, and analysis questions only emerged in the second meeting. According to Brown (2007), inference question is used to form conclusions that are not directly stated in instructional materials. Excerpt 6 presents the use of inference questions.

Excerpt 6

(B360) T : Iya. How do you know? How do you get the answer?

From paragraph?

(B361) Ss : One.

Excerpt 6 indicates that in the second meeting, one of the tasks discussed was about descriptive text entitled Niagara Fall. Therefore, the teacher used such questions to let them form a conclusion of how they obtained the answer from the descriptive text. Inference question did not occur in the first and third meeting, which seems to relate to the focus of lessons in both meeting.

Application questions only occurred in the second meeting which focused on checking mid-semester test including animal description. Here is one of examples of the use of application questions.

Excerpt 7

(B284) T : Yes, how do you spell it (refer to cock)?

(B285) Ss : C O C K (the students spelled the word cock)

Excerpt 7 shows that the teacher asked the students to spell the words “cock.” The question that begins with “how” allow students to apply information they heard or discussed before (Brown, 2007). In this case, they applied the material about spelling the alphabet and pronouncing certain words that they had discussed in the class before. Additionally, it was revealed from the interview that the teacher trained the students to spell and pronounce some English words by asking application questions so that these practices would benefit them in taking international tests and for their future jobs.

Furthermore, analysis questions also occurred in the second meeting. The teacher asked the student to differentiate one thing to another. Such question is used to break down something into parts or relate parts into whole (Brown, 2007). It requires the students to distinguish, classify, and relate the assumptions, evidence, hypothesis, and structure of a statement or question (Huitt, 2011). The use of analysis questions could be seen from the excerpt below.

Excerpt 8

(B308) T : Okay. So, for a dog and for a cock *bulunya*, *is it the same or different?*

(B309) Ss : Different.

Excerpt 8 shows that in the second meeting, the teacher asked such questions to enable the students distinguish between the word “bulu” for a dog and a cock. The words “feather” and “fur” refer to the same word in Indonesian which is “bulu.” It would be confusing for beginners to use vocabulary in the right context. Hence, the teacher emphasized the different use of “feather” which is used for cock and “fur” which is used for dog by asking such question. From the interview, it was also found that the teacher employed analysis questions to let the students differentiate between two similar words.

The last is synthesis questions which are used for combining elements into new pattern (Brown, 2007: 172). The common questions words are “What would you have done?”, “What would happen if?” (Brown, 2007: 172). Such questions were asked to reveal what the students would do if they were in particular situations and provided for a creative behavior of the parts of the students (Bloom et al., 1956: 162). Here is one of the examples of the use of synthesis questions.

Excerpt 9

(A384) T : Don’t forget when you are doing presentation in front of the class, *what should you do?*

(A385) Ss : Use name tag.

Excerpt 9 depicts that the English teacher applied synthesis questions. Such question suggested that the teacher asked the students to give their opinion about what they were supposed to do if they delivered a presentation in front of the class. This question required the students to combine previous experience they had in doing presentation with the new material, for example: the tenses they were supposed to use to respond such question. Based on the interview, the teacher asked

synthesis questions to allow the students to produce longer responses. However, in this study, not all of synthesis questions' responses were long enough, some of them were short.

The inference, application, and analysis questions only appeared in the second meeting because there were a variety of tasks in this meeting. The tasks included describing animals, finding antonyms, describing text, and translation. In the first meeting and third meeting, however, the teacher merely checked students' comprehension by matching numbers and pictures, and asked the students how to describe a person. Hence, most of the questions that emerged were knowledge questions. With a wide variety of tasks, the teacher could use a wide variety of questions types.

Synthesis questions emerged in the first meeting for once and the second meeting for five times. Such questions require higher-level thinking or reasoning skills since they belong to referential questions (McNeil, 2010). Based on the interview, the teacher admitted that she did not ask many high-level questions like inference, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation questions because the topic of the study was still in the first unit discussing descriptive text. For further topics such as narrative texts, she would use more referential questions which require higher cognitive level.

Furthermore, evaluation questions did not appear in the three meetings observed. Such questions are used to make a judgment of good and bad, right or wrong, according to some set of criteria, and state why (Brown, 2007: 172). The teacher did not use any evaluation questions because the topics discussed in the three meetings might not suit the use of evaluation questions. The teacher discussed parts of body in the first meeting; descriptive text, antonyms, animal's description, and translations in the second meeting; and describing a person in the last meeting. None of these topics was suitable for the teacher to ask evaluation questions requiring the students to make a judgment based on some set of criteria.

4. Conclusion

After discussed previously, it was found that the teacher performed six out of seven question types proposed by Brown (2007), including: knowledge, comprehension, application, inference, analysis, and synthesis questions. Each type of question has its own functions. In this study, knowledge questions were used to elicit factual answers, recall tests, recognize information, and check students' understanding. Comprehension questions were utilized to translate words from Indonesian to English, and vice versa. Application questions were employed to ask the students to spell and pronounce some words in the target language. To form conclusion that was not clearly stated in the material was the function of inference questions. Analysis questions were used to distinguish two similar words so that the students understood the differences. Finally, synthesis questions were employed to make prediction or give opinions of certain situations.

There were several factors that might influence the use of certain question types by the teacher; they were: the objectives of lesson, the variety of tasks, and the teacher's purpose in asking questions. First, the objectives of lesson determined the use of certain question types by the teacher. The use of appropriate question types will lead to the success of learning activities. Hence, the objectives of lesson should be designed thoroughly based on the desired competence and students' proficiency level. Second, the variety of tasks also determined the question types used by the teacher. The students could be guided to do tasks by the means of appropriate question types. Third, teacher's purpose in asking questions also affected the use of question types. Her purpose in asking questions then manifested to the question types she frequently employed which was knowledge questions.

Finally, since the present study has several limitations, the development of studies in similar area is recommended. Further research should be conducted to investigate not only question types used by the teacher but also questioning strategies.

5. References

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