CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The need for foreign language-proficient citizens appears to become essential in this free trade era. Being proficient in a language to most people may mean being able to communicate orally in the target language. Oral proficiency in a foreign language, for example, can be an important asset in seeking a job. Therefore, many foreign language students consider mastering speaking skill as their primary goal of study (Harlow and Muyskens, 1994 in Hadley, 2001). Moreover, according to Hadley (2001) recent research in second language acquisition has also regarded oral interaction as an important factor in the shaping of the learner's developing language.

Mastering a foreign language, however, is not a simple process. Brown (1991) contends that there is no 'quick-fix recipe' in learning a foreign language. Instead, it requires hard work from the students to learn the language because one language item cannot be acquired in one quick step. Often the students have to stumble on the errors that lead both the students and teachers to frustration. They could not help wondering why the same errors occurred over and over again even though the errors have been pointed out frequently. Do the students' errors indicate that the learners have failed to master the language?

When contrastive analysis theory dominated the theory of second language acquisition, errors were considered as the result mainly of L1 interference (Lightbown and Spada, 2003). Thus if the students commit errors, it shows that the students have failed to master the target language. Recent theories, however, discover that error is a natural phenomenon in foreign language classrooms. Further, it claims that the error is an indication of a learning process taking place in the learners' minds.

According to Ellis (2000) learning a foreign language is unlike building a wall like most people used to think, where we put one brick over the other. The process of learning a foreign language is "a U-shaped process where the students are able to produce correct language utterance early on only start making errors with it later" (Ellis, 2000: 23). Learning a language is about restructuring-constructing the knowledge by adding rules, deleting rules and reconstructing the whole system (Ellis, 2000). Selinker (in Ellis, 2000) calls this process as "interlanguage". Hence, Lightbown and Spada (2003) claimed that the more the errors the students committed, the more advanced their language competencies are.

Although the students' errors are natural phenomena in the language classroom, it is quite difficult to figure out if the teachers should ignore or treat them. If the teachers decided to correct the errors, they will be faced with these questions: which errors should be corrected? And how can teachers help the students to make the errors work for them? The answers to these questions are as complex as learning the language itself. It is even generally accepted that for the last two decades the language practitioners have different opinions on how to deal

with the students' errors (Tedjick and Gortari, 1998). The reason for the debate as Arnold (1999) rightly said is related to the negative impact of correction on the students' ego. Therefore, correcting the students' errors may convey, as Magilow (1999:125) puts it

> … in many ways …: confrontation, potential discouragement, a focus of forms instead of content, and subtexts of "I know the L2 better than you" and "you failed in spite of your good intentions to succeed". … each correction subtly reminds students of the asymmetrical power relationship in the classroom – an imbalance that exists in spite of the teachers' attempts to efface it through encouragement and humor.

This assumption leads some people (such as Krashen and Truscott) to have believed that the negative feedback is unnecessary in language classrooms. Moreover, Dekeyser (1993 in Johnson and Redmond, 2003) stated that error treatment did not improve the students' oral proficiency at all. The opposing view, on the other hand, believe that error correction is important in language classroom because some studies have shown that if the correction is given in the right way, it can improve the students' language skills. By providing the students with correction the students can learn which language item they need to work on and which feature they have made progress.

They even argue that the students whose errors are corrected show no feeling of offense. Therefore, they claim that the assumption that the correction makes the students discouraged is untenable. Puchta (1999) notes that the students may react negatively to the correction if they have weak self-concept, or if the teacher overreacts verbally or nonverbally to the errors.

Nevertheless, the teachers are dealing with the students whose characteristics and learning styles varied. Some students may accept corrective

feedback as one process of learning, while the other students may see it as an offense. The teachers want the students to like and respect them, but they also need to treat the errors which may receive negative reaction from some students. This teacher's pedagogical dilemma is what this study attempts to investigate. This study tries to explore the patterns of senior high school teachers' corrective feedback on students' spoken errors. The research would focus on the teachers' roles in response to the students' spoken errors, the type of error they prefer to respond, and the strategy they choose to employ in treating the errors.

1.2. Research Questions

There are four questions that this study aims to explore. Those questions are:

1.   What roles do the teachers play in response to the students' spoken errors?

2.   What spoken errors do the teachers choose to correct?

3.   Why do the teachers correct those errors?

4.   What strategies do the teachers employ to correct the students' spoken errors?

1.3. General Approach to the Study

This study attempts to investigate the teachers' provision of corrective feedback in the language classrooms. The phenomena under investigation were largely approached using qualitative, descriptive, and interpretive method of inquiry (Maxwell, 1996) and some descriptive quantification of data was employed to find

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the percentage of the corrected errors and the employed corrective feedback strategies. This approach is suitable for the study since it examines the teachers' perspective on their actions, and the way in which their belief affects their behavior (Maxwell, 1996).

To elicit data from the field, both preliminary and primary research were conducted. The underlying reason for conducting preliminary research was to gain a brief insight on what was going on in the classroom specifically in terms of corrective feedback. The information gathered from the preliminary research may help the researcher to understand the phenomena encountered in the main study.

1.4. Significance of the Study

Many people believe that English teaching-learning in Indonesia has failed to equip the learners with English competence. Some people claimed that the core of this problem lies on the teacher's limited competence of the target language. Being non native speakers of English and being the learner language, the Indonesian English teachers are faced with the possibility of their linguistic competence getting fossilized and stabilized. When the teachers' knowledge is fossilized, it may cause the learners to commit errors and it may be difficult for the teachers to notice the students' errors. Thus there might be many errors left uncorrected.

Barlett (2002) found in his study that Korean English teachers had difficulty in identifying students' errors and explaining why some students' utterances were considered as errors. These phenomena prompted the present study to find out if the

same phenomena occurred in the Indonesian English classrooms. Allwright (1975, in Pannova and Lyster, 1996) said that "the research on teacher feedback had the potential to provide information about the effectiveness of the instructional process and ultimately knowledge about how language learning takes place".

Hence it is hoped that this study would give picture of how language teaching and learning process occurred in Indonesia, and a glimpse description of teacher's abilities in identifying errors.

1.5. Clarification of Key Terms

Because of the possible confusion arising from the use of the terminology, a brief review of the definitions of terms is presented as follows:

The first term is corrective feedback. Lyster (2002) stated that there are at least four feedback terminologies: error correction, negative feedback, corrective feedback, and interactional feedback. Schachter (1991, in Lyster and Ranta, 1997) noted that the different labels of feedback reflect different research concerns and approaches to data collection. Corrective feedback is the term used by the teachers in second language classrooms. Thus the term corrective feedback is chosen in the present study to refer to "any behavior following an error that minimally attempts to inform the learner of the fact of error" (Chaudron, 1988 in el Tatawy, n.d.:1). While Lightbown and Spada define corrective feedback as

> Any indication to the learners that their use of the target language is incorrect. This includes various responses that the learners receive. When a language learner says, 'He go to school everyday', corrective feedback can be explicit, for example, 'no, you should say goes, not go' or implicit 'yes, he goes to school everyday', and may or may not

include metalinguistic information, for example, 'Don't forget to make the verb agree with the subject'. (1999, in El Tatawi, n.d.:1)

Hence, the teachers' corrective feedback is the teachers' response to the students' errors to let them know that their utterances contained a particular form that is not acceptable according to the target language norms.

The second term is spoken errors. Spoken errors refer to the students' deviant oral utterances. The deviant utterances do not necessarily occur in communicative activities in which the students are required to produce their own utterances, but they may also occur during the students reading the text, dialogue or questions and answers from the LKS (students' workbooks).

1.6. Thesis Organization

Following the introductory chapter is a review of theories that frame the research. The theories reviewed include types of error, error correction strategy from Lyster and Ranta (1997), and teachers' roles in response to spoken errors which are adapted from Tanner and Green (1998). Chapter 3 provides a detailed discussion on the research method adopted for the study.

The analysis of the data taken from the field is elaborated in chapter four. The sequence of discussions of each part in chapter four is based on the research questions. The explanation in chapter four may be overlapping, the elaborated data in one part may be repeated in another parts. A plausible explanation for this is that the answers to the research questions are interrelated to one another.

The last chapter, chapter 5, discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings on the teaching learning activities. The chapter ends with suggestions for future research.