



## Students' Perception during Negotiation of Meaning in Unfocused and Focused Tasks

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### ABSTRACT

This current study aimed to determine the students' perception of using unfocused and focused tasks. The design of the study was qualitative. The subjects of the study were 10 medical students of UPT Balai Bahasa Universitas Malahayati. The data were collected through speaking tests and questionnaires. The speaking test of speaking focused and unfocused was administrated. The students' utterances will be recorded and described. The data will be analyzed in which types of negotiation of meaning are done by the speakers. The results of the research showed that the student's perception, open-ended interview method aimed at measuring perceptions of unfocused and focused tasks served as the research instrument. The results showed that the two tasks indicated that the unfocused task was enjoyable to most of the students, yet they failed to get input for the development of their language quality because during the negotiation of meaning they focused more on meaning. Moreover, the focused task was enjoyable for higher language proficiency to do. Hence, it could be inferred that the focused task was not suitable for lower language proficiency.

**Keywords:** *focused task, negotiation of meaning, students' perception, unfocused task*

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui persepsi siswa dalam menggunakan tugas yang tidak fokus dan terfokus. Desain penelitian ini adalah kualitatif. Subyek penelitian ini adalah 10 mahasiswa kedokteran UPT Balai Bahasa Universitas Malahayati. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui tes berbicara dan angket. Tes berbicara berbicara terfokus dan tidak fokus dilaksanakan. Ucapan siswa akan direkam dan dideskripsikan. Data tersebut akan dianalisis di mana jenis negosiasi makna yang dilakukan oleh penutur. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa persepsi siswa, metode wawancara terbuka yang bertujuan mengukur persepsi tidak fokus dan fokus tugas dijadikan sebagai instrumen penelitian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kedua tugas tersebut menunjukkan bahwa tugas tidak fokus itu menyenangkan bagi sebagian besar siswa, namun mereka gagal mendapatkan masukan untuk pengembangan kualitas bahasa mereka karena selama negosiasi makna mereka lebih fokus pada makna. Selain itu, tugas yang terfokus itu menyenangkan untuk dilakukan dengan kemampuan bahasa yang lebih tinggi. Oleh karena itu, dapat disimpulkan bahwa tugas terfokus tidak cocok untuk kemampuan bahasa yang lebih rendah.

**Kata Kunci:** *persepsi murid, tugas terfokus, tugas tidak terfokus*

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## INTRODUCTION

Negotiation of meaning has received a reputation among the second language or foreign language acquisition. Negotiation of meaning is defined as conversational modifications or adjustments when learners and their interlocutors have trouble in understanding messages. Negotiation of meaning occurs in everyday interaction as a communication strategy that clarifies meaning to facilitate comprehensible messages (Ko, Schallert, & Walters, 2003). In addition, the negotiation of meaning which takes place while learners are being involved in communication in the target language is believed to be able to help the learners with their language development. Hence, the negotiation of meaning occurring during learners' interaction can help students with their language acquisition development (Foster, Pauline & Ohta, Amy, 2005). Since it is affirmed that learners can also acquire comprehensible input from the output on the condition that there are corrections from the interlocutors.

In relation to the statements concerned, there have been several types of research involving negotiation of meaning, Kitajima, 2009 (explores face-to-face manners, when NS's and NSS's interaction); Jungmi, 2003 (examines teachers' and students' interaction). Other research were conducted to examine the interaction between NSS's and fellow NSS's (Yufrizal 2007, Farangis, 2013) also the interaction through online messenger (Yazigi and Seedhouse, 2005; Luciana, 2005; Arslanyilmaz and Pedersen, 2010). Farangis, (2013) examined how negotiation influences L2 acquisition. A questionnaire is used to ask learners about the process of L2 acquisition. This study involved 40 learners in an institution. Cluster sampling technique was used in selecting the participants. The result shows that negotiation is helpful in improving L2 acquisition. There is a meaningful difference between marks in pre-test and post-test scores.

Therefore, in accordance with the contribution of the NoM to aid and produce comprehensible and interactive communication, peer correction is included in speaking activities. It is referred to as peer review, peer feedback, peer response, and peer evaluation where students analyze their peer utterances produced by their peers. Assuming that consideration of input hypotheses in providing peers feedback, certain activities will be carried out for students' input (watching an interview) to influence their output (both giving feedback and carrying out the conversation). To sum up, the need to provide circumstances where learners get comprehensible input and practice the input to be a comprehensible output in terms of carrying out the conversation on a certain topic while they are trying to correct their peers' utterances through negotiation of meaning.

To insight students to conduct a situation where they share thoughts and experiences, the teaching activity must include an active environment. One of the activities that may provide such an environment is the implementation of a task-based. Dealing with the task, it is suggested learning activities should apply unfocused tasks (the tasks that are not bound to certain linguistic elements) and focused tasks (the tasks that are bound to certain linguistic elements, for instance, grammar and vocabulary, so learners are also involved in the process of studying things relating to linguistics) so as to provide chances for them to use the target language. To enhance the task activity, there are two types of task activities employed: 1) Input hypothesis, which indicates in the learning process, a teacher need not create any order of grammatical lessons since learners use their grammar knowledge naturally (Terrel's, 1986), 2) Output hypothesis. This theory of output hypothesis implies that when a learner utters or produces expressions or sentences (Swain's, 1985; Swain and Lapkin's, 1995; and Ellis's, 1991).

In this situation, when learners started to be able to identify errors and try to correct them, this language awareness can get learners involved in such cognitive processes as noticing, hypothesis testing, problem-solving, and restructuring. In addition, this language awareness is in fact one of the forms of constructivism in the learning process, which centers on learners developing their knowledge step by step (Yufrizal, Panji and Flora, 2017).

Hence, to enhance this learning situation, students need to have many target language practices (Bourke, 2008). However, the EFL students in Indonesia have very limited time to use the target language they are studying and it negatively impacts their results (Mahpul & Rhonda, 2018). Therefore, it is a necessity to provide the learners with the tasks making it possible for them to have adequate time to practice the target language. To raise the linguistic qualities of learners, it is advisable to group learners based on their English qualities (Luciana, 2005). However, there is no research that describes what state negotiation of meaning contributes to learning outcomes the most, and which task contributes the most to students' negotiation of meaning. However, there is no research that describes the students' perception of using unfocused and focused tasks

Therefore, this research aims to determine the students' perception of using unfocused and focused tasks.

## **METHOD**

The method of this study was qualitative research and its design was a case study. According to Suparman (2009) a case study can be defined as an exploration of a "bounded system" or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection

involving multiple sources of information rich in context. The data collection in a case study is extensive and based on multiple sources of information, such as observation, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials. In this research, the researcher used interviews to consider students' perceptions during interaction in the classroom.

The number of participants in this research was six semester of medical students in UPT Balai Bahasa Universitas Malahayati. The sample of this research would be randomly chosen, the research will use only 1 class consisting of 10 students. They would be divided into 5 groups; each group consists of 2 people. The students were grouped based on their language proficiency level. Instruments which would be used in this study, are:

The possibility to apply a questionnaire was permitted in qualitative research whenever the result is descriptions. The questionnaire was the list of questions used to find the information which is stated by respondents. According to Arikunto (2006:152), an open questionnaire is a questionnaire that gives chance for the respondents to share their opinion through their own sentences.

The questions would be adapted from Mahpul (2014) question lists. The questions based on 6 categories that matter to the teaching activity. There are 1) level of difficulty, 2) degree of stress, 3) confidence in class, 4) interest of learning, 5) motivation in learning, 6) learning outcomes.

Table 1. Students' Perception Questionnaire adapted from Mahpul 2014

No	Categories	Question
1	Level of Difficulty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you follow the steps or the procedure during the learning activity?</li> <li>• Are the tasks given hard or easy to do?</li> <li>• Which tasks is hard and which one is easy?</li> <li>• What makes you think that the task is hard or easy?</li> </ul>
2	Degree of stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you feel when you were doing the activity?</li> <li>• Which activity made you so?</li> <li>• What made you feel that way?</li> <li>• What about the other task? How did you feel?</li> <li>• What made you feel that way?</li> </ul>
3	Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your opinion, how well did you accomplish all the tasks?</li> <li>• Which tasks you do you think you accomplished the better?</li> <li>• What make you think so?</li> </ul>
4	Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think the activity? Is it interesting?</li> <li>• Does the activity make you want to learn more?</li> </ul>

No	Categories	Question
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Which activity is the most interesting? And what makes you think so?</li> </ul>
5	Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the activity motivate you to speak more?</li> <li>What makes you think that way?</li> </ul>
6	Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does this activity benefits to your English understandings? Why? Give example!</li> </ul> <p>In your opinion, which task help you more in understand English?</p>

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research are described based on the research questions. The student's perceptions of learning involve a focused and an unfocused task for each category, i.e., Level of Difficulty, Degree of Stress, Confidence, Interest, Motivation, and Learning Outcomes. This data was obtained from the open-ended questionnaire, as described in the methodology. Students' perception during the implementation of unfocused tasks is described below.

Table 2. Students Perception of the Use of Focused and Unfocused Task

No	Perception	Level of Perception	Focused Task	Unfocused Task
1	Level of Difficulty	Easy	4 students	8 students
		Difficult	6 students	2 students
2	Degree of stress	Less stress	5 students	7 students
		More stress	5 students	3 students
3	Confidence	More confident	5 students	10 students
		Less confident	5 students	- students
4	Interest	Being interested	4 students	7 students
		Being not interested	6 students	3 students
5	Motivation	Motivated	8 students	10 students
		Less motivated	2 students	- students
6	Learning Outcomes	Having good learning outcomes	8 students	3 students
		Not having good learning outcomes	2 students	7 students

The perceptions dealing with category were positively related to the of other categories. The categories are Level of Difficulty, Degree of Stress, Confidence, Interest, and Motivation, as well as the Learning Outcomes. It could be inferred that the result of this research shows that all participant claimed that they assumed the level of difficulty category of the unfocused task was low. It was due to the topic had been familiar to them. Moreover,

the students felt relaxed since they were engaged in discussions with their friends. They also felt confident during the implementation of unfocused task. It was easy and interesting. This leads to the idea that positive perceptions of motivation result in positive effects on language learners' success (Oroujlou & vahedi, 2011). The results also describe that all the students attempted their best to understand and to be understood during their interaction. It is in support of what multiple previous researchers found out (Farangis, 2013) that learners make efforts to understand and to be understood during their communication, which they call negotiation of meaning.

During the implementation unfocused task, most of the pairs spontaneously expressed their ideas. Dealing with this phenomenon, Richards (2006) suggested that it is available for language learners to be given some room for naturally expressing their ideas. However, it was confirmed that the learning process in the unfocused task did not give sufficient positive effect on the development of the language proficient as they just applied of what they had got.

In spite of the situation where students were suggested to make error correction or help in terms of linguistic problem, it seems it was not applied as a whole. There were only several students with higher level proficiency that practiced this. This situation also only appeared at the beginning of the discussion.

However, for those who were lower proficiency, when the learner asked the learner with higher proficiency for assistance even when they should not. In this case, Swain's (1985) theory of the output hypothesis, that it is also possible for learners to get input from their own output, was in recorded. This situation happened to the students with lower proficiency of the higher proficiency. The learners did not make corrections or provide help since they focused on the conveyed messages. The lower proficiency learners involved more code mixing. This result is in congruence with what Khotimah (2014) revealed in the context of Indonesian learners who often used mother tongue when they encountered trouble in expressing their ideas in English.

Driven the fact that the learners practiced code-mixing and code-switching, hence there were no solutions to the linguistic problems during the discussions, it is of very small opportunities that there was some development of the learners' language quality in the unfocused task. Therefore, it confirms what inferred that during interaction, learners engage negotiation of meaning but this engagement does not make any contribution to their language development.

Based on the result of the interview, it could be acknowledged that it is known that only the students who have higher language proficiency pair that got something new. It could be happened due to the absence of knowing the meaning of certain word. The partner (who have higher proficiency) provided the necessary help as the it was asked for. However, the lower proficiency learner requested for their partner's assistance in respect of vocabulary at the beginning of the discussion only. In view of this, it is safe to say that the lower proficiency learner's vocabulary developed only a bit as they applied code-mixing more than the higher language proficiency provided help or made a correction.

Low language development, the topic of the unfocused task well suited the learners' characters, which is advisable in a learning process. It probably drives learners' motivation to have effort to express their ideas in English more. By repeatedly practicing what they have got, learners will be more and more accustomed to using it spontaneously. Therefore, in order to optimize the contribution of the unfocused task to learners' language development, it is of paramount importance to form pairs or groups composed of learners with different levels of proficiency. It is noteworthy here to instruct them to request for assistance when they have trouble in expressing their ideas is as essential.

### **Focused Task**

Based on the result described above, the focused task in this research was to discuss the linguistic problems the students had produced in their unfocused-task discussions. The result in this respect bears the implication that each pair had different perceptions relating to the categories. For the category level of difficulty, all the higher proficiency learners claimed that this task had been easy. This category was not contradictive to the other perception categories, i.e. Degree of Stress, Confidence, Interest, and Motivation, in terms of how the students perceived them. Referring to the transcripts of their dialogues, it was felt that the learners felt relaxed since they had the discussions with their own friends, which also caused them to be confident in themselves while expressing their ideas. They also found the task easy and interesting. Students with higher level of proficiency claimed that they had shared ideas with each other during the discussion.

Considering the learning outcomes, it could be inferred that the hypothesis proposed by Swain (1985) played a role here since the higher proficiency students got knowledge (input) owing to their own utterance (output). Moreover, the higher language proficiency learners claimed similar thing, the focused task had been easy. It was proofed that the students could even explanations and example sentence which eventually resulted in the

partner's right understanding of the matter. This result is particularly in favor of Schurz and Coumel (2020) who stated in the case of L2 learners tend to prefer explicit grammar teaching.

As for the lower language proficiency students, they shared the perception that the focused task (in the form of the discussion about the linguistic problems that they had produced during their unfocused-task discussion) was difficult. They admitted that they had not been able to correct the mistakes. This caused the learners to admit that they had been stressed, unconfident, and had found the material dull. However, they affirmed that they had been motivated to make corrections to several sentences though they were still doubtful about the corrections.

Based on the result of the interviews and the transcripts of the students' utterances, it is clearly seen to believe that the lower proficiency students pair acquired a lot of input as the higher language proficiency learner gave such clear explanations and examples that the lower language proficiency had adequate comprehension of the related points.

Moreover, the higher language proficiency students claimed that they were motivated to be engaged in the learning activity with the focused task at its core as it contributed a good deal to their language awareness,

Most of the students confirmed that the focused task drove them to better awareness of language rules. Therefore, it is fair to say that this task is capable of intensifying learners' language awareness.

In this research, the lower language proficiency students claimed that they had been curious about why the sentences were wrong, yet they were not able to figure out the answers since they had no knowledge of it. Frankly speaking, this agrees that being aware without the bait is not enough for learners' language development. It needs to be accompanied by the ability to find out solutions to problems. Therefore, for the good of learners' language development, making pairs or groups of students with various levels of proficiency is at par with other fundamental steps.

## CONCLUSION

Unfocused and focused tasks in English learning both have advantages and weaknesses. In this research carried out in Indonesian perspective, as befitted the learners' characters, the topic of the unfocused-task discussion was personality traits, so that the pairs, though their levels of proficiency were different, were all achingly enthusiastic about the expression of their ideas. They confidently expressed their ideas in English in a spontaneous



manner, though some of them had to involve code-mixing using the Indonesian language. However, they did not pay enough attention to linguistic problems. The Lower language proficiency learners did code-mix so often that they acquired almost no input for the good of their language development from this task. Apropos of the focused task (which comprised the discussions about the linguistic problems they had produced in the unfocused task). The higher language proficiency learners had such decent language awareness that they could solve or explained the linguistic problems.

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