THE ANALYSIS OF TURN SIGNALS IN IELTS SPEAKING PRACTICE
(A STUDY OF IELTS EXAMINER AND CANDIDATES IN ELC MAKASSAR)

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ABSTRACT

This paper concerns turn-taking mechanism and describes especially the kinds of turn signals that speakers interpret with respect to such conversational functions as holding, yielding, taking, claiming, and suppressing the speaking turn. The speakers were examiner and candidates who took turns in IELTS speaking practice. The speaking practices were videotaped and transcribed to allow the analysis of speakers' turn signals through gesture, verbal and nonverbal cues. The result shows that the examiner and candidates employed turn taking signals 75 times, turn holding signals 40 times, turn yielding signals 40 times, turn claiming signals 5 times, and turn suppressing signals 2 times. These turn signals were used by the examiner and candidates as indications of holding, yielding, taking, claiming and suppressing the speaking turns.

Key words: Turn taking, turn yielding, turn claiming, turn suppressing, IELTS Speaking Practice

INTRODUCTION

Being able to speak and understand English does not mean that the speakers can successfully manage a good face to face communication with other speakers of English. In fact, this interaction can be negatively affected by severe communication problems caused by the lack of speakers' knowledge about turn-taking mechanism. Goffman (1963) studies that with the help of turn-taking mechanism, participants can create smooth and appropriate exchange of speaking turns. In fact, this turn-taking mechanism consists of signals which guide the speakers to achieve successful exchange of their interchangeable roles as speakers and listener. Rahman (2006) states that the turn signals in English conversations consist of verbal turn signals such as *oh*, *okay*, *yeah*, and *well* and non-verbal ones such as *increasing volume*, *posture shift*, *nodding*, and *laughter*.

There will be some particular situations where turn signals are performed when two or more people are talking to each other. Goffman (1955) states that first the speaker talks and gives some signals to the listener to claim his turn. Second, the speaker talks simultaneously and the listener employs some signals trying to take his turns to speak. Third, both participants claim the speaking turn at the same time or act as a speaker. Fourth, both participants may also become listeners by not claiming the turn which creates a silence for duration of time. In order to ensure a smooth exchange of speaking turns, speakers may display some turn signals which are parts in a turn taking mechanism.

When conversing, speaker and listener will look for some behavioral signals performed by other speakers such as hand gestures, verbal and nonverbal cues to determine when they can yield the turn to other speaker, take the turn when other speakers release the turn, hold the turn when they want to lengthen the speaking turn, or claim the speaking turn when they feel that the current speaker has talked for such a while.

Poyatos in Rahman (2006) summarizes the kinds of turn signals such as turn claiming, turn yielding, turn taking, turn holding, turn suppressing as well as an item called back channel item which is not a part of turn signals, but this item does occur as listener response in conversation. Turn claiming is a signal made by a listener indicating that he wants to say something or that the speaker has held the floor long enough. Rahman (2006:67) mentions verbal turn claiming signals employed by Indonesian speakers in the conversation including *and*, *because yeah*, *but*, *but er*, *hm*, *hm hm*, *oh*, *oh I see*, *oh yeah*, *okay*, *okay but*, *okay okay*, *or…*, *so*, *that's right*, *yap*, *yeah*, *er*, *yeah and*, *yeah whether*, *and yes*. Non-verbal turn claiming signals made by the speakers in conversations include *raising hand palm upwards, raising eyebrows, shifting one's posture* and *laughter*.

Turn yielding signal is a signal occurring when the speaker feels he has gone

on long enough, when the listener look bored or ignorant of the subject, or when the listener has claimed or briefly taken the floor. Turn yielding signal is a signal occurring when the speaker feels he has gone on long enough, when the listener look bored or ignorant of the subject, or when the listener has claimed or briefly taken the floor. Duncan (1972) defined a set of six behavioral cues referred as the turn yielding signals. These six behavioral cues maybe displayed either individually or together. First is intonation in which the speaker terminates in a final clause with a rising or falling pitch level. Second, the speaker drawls on the final syllable or on the stressed syllable of a terminal clause. Third, the termination can be seen from the hand gesticulation used during a speaking. Fourth is the appearance of one of expressions which typically follow a statement such as "but uh," or "something like" or "you know." Fifth, a specific phrases at the end of the syntactical unit such as "that's it", "that's what I want to say", "that's what I am saying", or "that's all". Sixth, there are changes in gaze direction for example the speaker looks away from the hearer as the utterance begins and look toward the hearer when the utterance ends.

Turn taking signal, on the other hand, is a signal that occurs when a listener takes the floor after the speaker shows his willingness to relinquish his turn or when his turn claiming has failed and he just decides to take it. Turn taking signal is a signal that occurs when a listener takes the floor after the speaker shows his willingness to relinquish his turn or when his turn claiming has failed and he just decides to take it. The signals for turn taking are something like *no, I was going to say that …, yeah …, well …, uh …, a thankful nod,* or *a posture shift*. Rahman (2006:64) stated that the verbal turn signals employed by Indonesian speakers in the conversation include *ah, and, but, eh, em/mm, em so, er, hm, hm and, hm hm, hm hm okay, hm hm so, hm yeah, hm okay but, nah, oh, oh I see, oh I see okay er, oh I see so okay, oh I see yeah, oh oh, oh okay, oh okay er, oh so, oh yeah, oh yeah yeah, oh yes, okay, okay okay, okay okay so, okay so, okay so so, okay well, or, so, sure, well, yup, yeah, yeah but, yeah (laughter), yeah I see, yeah er, yeah so, yeah yeah good, yeah so er, yeah yeah, yeah yes, yes, yes but, yes okay okay*. On the other hand, the non-verbal turn taking signals performed by the speakers in the conversations include *eye contact* or *casting a glance at the eye of other parties, increasing volume, a thankful nod, shifting one's a posture,* and *laughter*.

Turn holding signal is an attempt to suppress a turn claim with something like *wait …, let me finish …,* or *an increase volume* to overpower the listener. The turn holding signals will be performed by the speakers when they want to hold or prolong their turn. The turn holding signals will be performed by the speakers when they want to hold or prolong their turn. Rahman (2006:65) stated that the verbal turn holding signals used by Indonesian speakers are *and, and then, because, but, er, er and, in home, okay, okay well, or, so, so er, so em, then, yeah, yeah but, yeah so,* and *yes and then*, while the nonverbal turn holding signals employed by these speakers are *raising hand palm upwards, increasing volume,* and *laughter*.

In addition, turn suppressing signal is related to turn holding but it can be started by any of those present and not simply the speaker, for example, *let him finish, wait, listen,* and *gestures symbolizing stop* or *holding the claimer's hand*.

IELTS stands for International English Language Testing System. It is a test of English which consists of writing, speaking, reading and listening practice. IELTS speaking practice takes between 10 and 15 minutes. It is composed by an oral interview between the examiner and the candidates. Seedhouse (2006) states that there are three main parts in IELTS speaking practice. Each part fulfills a specific function in terms of interaction pattern, task input, and candidate output.

In speaking practice part 1, the candidates are required to answer general questions about themselves, their homes/families, their jobs/studies, their interests, and other familiar topic areas. In speaking practice part 2, the candidates will be given a verbal prompt on a card and is asked to talk on a particular topic. The candidates have one minute to prepare before speaking for about one or two minutes. The examiner then asks one or two questions. Finally, in speaking practice part 3, the examiner and candidates will engage in a discussion of more abstract issues and concepts which are link to the topic prompt in speaking practice part 2.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research was a descriptive qualitative method. This research

aimed at gaining the data that were observed during the face to face interaction between the examiner and participants. The data were transcribed in order to gain the complete sequences of speech and behavioral cues used by both speakers. After that, the data were categorized and analyzed based on the concepts of turn-taking mechanism. The participants of this research were the examiner and the candidates of IELTS preparation class in ELC Makassar. One IELTS examiner and 6 students participate in this research. The examiner was a native speaker from Brazil who was assigned to examine IELTS speaking in ELC Makassar. The IELTS candidates came from various educational backgrounds and had different goals in taking IELTS tests. They were a bank teller, home developer, secretary who took IELTS test to certify their English language command, students who wish to pursue international educations in Australian and United Kingdom, and an unemployment who used to work in Australian company in Middle East.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The kinds of turn signals that were mostly used in IELTS speaking practice.

There are different numbers of turn signals occurred in each observed IELTS speaking practice. It can be seen that, in the first speaking practice, participants performed 5 turn claiming signals namely *it's okay*, *laughter*, *okay*, *sorry*, *may I answer?*, *and raising hand palm upward*, however, in the following speaking practices (SP), participants did not use any turn claiming signals. Turn taking signals appeared to be the most frequently used signals in each speaking practice in that participants in SP1 used 14 turn taking signals namely *so*, *ee*, *okay*, *oh well*, *yeah*, *okay*, *so*, *okay*, *well*, *okay well*, *eye contact*, *shifting one's posture*, *start hand gesticulation*, in SP2 used 12 turn taking signals including *okay*, *so*, *and okay so*, in SP3 used 15 turn taking signals including *so, okay so*, *ah*, *yeah okay*, *okay ee*, *um okay*, *yeah but*, *start hand gesticulation*, in SP4 used 12 signals namely *okay*, *so*, *okay so*, *it's okay, ee*, in SP5 used 9 turn taking signals including *okay, okay so, so, um so, owh yeah*, and in SP6 used 13 turn taking signals namely *well*, *so*, *okay so, okay*, *but,* and *start hand gesticulation*.

The second most frequently used turn signal is turn yielding signal. The signals appeared 5 times in both SP1 and SP2 including the signals *okay*, *it is*, *laughter*, *termination of hand gesticulation, forward hand movement* , 10 times in SP3 including *or*, *so (drawled by the speaker)*, *eye contact*, *termination of hand gesticulation*, 3 times in SP4 including *termination of hand gesticulation*, *eye contact*, *so*, 5 times in SP5 including *just like that, yeah, you know, so, termination of hand gesticulation*, and 12 times in SP6 including *just that, termination of hand gesticulation, eyebrows raised, eye contact, leaning forward, head nod*.

On the other hand, the number of turn holding signals used in each speaking practice was slightly different from the number of turn yielding signals. Participants in SP1 displayed 7 turn holding signals namely *so, increasing volume, but*, in SP2 displayed 9 turn holding signals including *so, okay, and then, okay so, and, laughter, ee*, in SP3 displayed 7 turn holding signals including *and, ee, so*, in SP4 displayed 6 turn holding signals *so, and then, and*, in SP5 displayed 4 turn holding signals namely *and also, so*, and in SP6 displayed 6 turn holding signals including *so, then, looking at the sailing*. In addition, the table showed that the least frequently used turn signal is turn suppressing signal. This signal was merely employed twice by the participants in SP3 including *wait a second, gesture symbolizing stop*.

Discussion

The examiner and the candidate of IELTS preparation class performed various turn signals in their face to face speaking practice. As a matter of fact, turn taking signals, turn holding, and turn yielding signals seemed to be the most frequently used signals during the IELTS speaking practice. Meanwhile, turn claiming signals and turn suppressing signals were used less frequently during the practice. Candidates were required to perform their speaking ability in order to ensure the examiner that they were able to conduct a good English conversation both professionally or academically. Due to the candidates were required to answer some questions in the given time, the examiner needed to claim the speaking turn when the candidates exceeded the time in answering the questions.

The candidates also needed to take the speaking turn when the examiner relinquished

her turns. When the candidates were not able to signal that they would take the turn, the examiner might have thought that the candidates had insufficient language knowledge to say something as a response, or the candidate did not understand the question and she needed to explain the question one more time. When expanding their answer to convince the examiner that they are capable enough in using the language. Turn holding signal is used by the participants when expressing their ideas in order that they are given time to give their clear explanation toward the related question. The examiner and the candidates needed to yield the turn when they thought that they had already finished what they wanted to say. Examiner may yield the turn by asking question or by signaling the candidates with turn yielding signals. The candidate may yield the turn when they finished answering the question or had no more thing to say by the use of turn yielding signals as well.

The candidates generally used hand gesticulation when dealing with difficult topics in IELTS speaking part 2 and 3 in which they should gave their opinion about some particular topics. McNail (1992) also stated that a speaker will display hand movements more frequent when dealing with difficult topics. It can be inferred that when the candidates spoke and performed hand gesticulation, the examiner would not interrupt to take the speaking turn. These hand movements also can be considered as turn taking signal because when the candidates began to speak and started the hand movement, it was indicated that the candidates had taken the speaking turn.

CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

Based on the findings and discussion in the previous chapter, the researcher put forward the following conclusions:
1. IELTS examiner and candidates in ELC Makassar employed turn signals. It was indicated that the most frequently used turn signals were turn taking, turn holding, and turn yielding signal and the less frequently used turn signals were turn claiming and turn suppressing.
2. Turn taking signals were used 75 times, turn holding signals were used 40 times, and turn yielding signals were used 40 times during the speaking practices whereas,

turn claiming signals were used 5 times and turn suppressing signals were used twice. The examiner and candidates performed these signals in order to best decide when they could take, hold, yield, claim, and suppress the speaking turns.

The researcher suggests several things as follows:
1. It is suggested that the examiner and candidates of IELTS preparation class know more about turn signals and backchannel signals in order to conduct a good and smooth exchange of speaking turns.
2. It is suggested that teachers equip their students with sufficient knowledge of turn-taking mechanisms especially turn signals and backchannel signals in order to prepare the students to be a good intercultural speakers of English.

It is recommended that the next researcher observed deeply about turn signals particularly in term of speakers' culture, social status, and the level of speaking topic difficulty.

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