COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN TEACHING ENGLISH FOR 3RD YEAR ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS: ADVANTAGES AND WEAKNESSES

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Abstract

English as international language is learned by many people all over the world. In certain country, like Indonesia, English is still regarded as foreign language different from in Philippine or Malaysia in which English is their second language. These different positions make the emergence of various ways of teaching English. This writing is aimed at describing one way of teaching English called communicative approach. The object of this writing is to see the advantages and weaknesses of this method applied for the beginners. The research is conducted at English Department Andalas University where third year students become the subject. Data are collected by observational method with note-taking and interviewing technique. The analysis is done by using referential identity method related to the concept proposed by Savignon (2002). The result of analysis is descriptively presented. Having analyzed data, it is found three advantages and three weaknesses of using communicative approach in teaching English for 3rd year English Department students. The advantages are (1) enhancing students' competence in speaking English in various situation; (2) encouraging students to practice their English in real communication; (3) stimulating the students to speak communicatively; (4) motivating students to be brave interacting using English. The weaknesses are (1) focusing much on meaning not form; (2) regarding learning structure is useless and irrelevant; and (3) discouraging students who have lack vocabularies to speak.

Keywords: Communicative Approach, English as an International language, English communication

INTRODUCTION

Language is very crucial in human' life. Through language, ideas, feelings, information can be delivered so as to facilitate cooperation between the members of society (Leech, 1981:40). It means that by language human being can communicate with others all over the world.

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One of the languages that enables people to have international contact is English. As an international language, the bridge of one country with others, English must be familiar with public. In the sense that, those who communicate by using English must know it well or at least understand it.

Since not all people use English as their national language or even a secondary one, the problem comes up. How could communication take place provided sounds produced are unintelligible? Therefore, it is of prime importance to learn the dominant language which also prominently involves the teaching method.

Some methods have been proposed by many linguists to teach English as foreign language. One of them is communicative approach. Communicative approach is one way of teaching English communicatively. This approach is regarded as the most effective way of teaching language to language learners. However, no one approach is better than others. Nor is one approach is worse than others.

This simple article is aimed at answering the phenomena of using the communicative approach in teaching English. The aim of this writing is to describe the advantages and the weaknesses of this communicative.

The research is conducted at English Department Andalas University. The subjects are third year-students. The data are collected by observational method with note-taking and interviewing technique. The analysis is done by relating to the concept proposed by Savignon (2002). The result of analysis is descriptively presented.

ABOUT COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

Language teaching theories are like human being that never get satisfaction of what they have got. Similarly, the methods of language teaching are always reformed or replaced after being used. People once were of great interest in Grammar Translation Method, then the Direct Method, Reading Method, Audio-Lingual Method, Natural Approach, and now of what the so- called the Communicative Approach (also confirm Steinberg et al, 2001:190)

When the American linguists were fascinated by the development of new method, Audio Lingual Approach, their European counterparts had also been thinking of creating a new way to teach foreign language. The establishment of Council Europe in 10949 was for this very purpose (Darjowidjojo, 1993:3). Around 1970s-1980s, there developed in both Europe and North America an approach to foreign and second language teaching that dealt with anthropologists, sociologists, and sociolinguists. It has concentrated on language as the development of learners'

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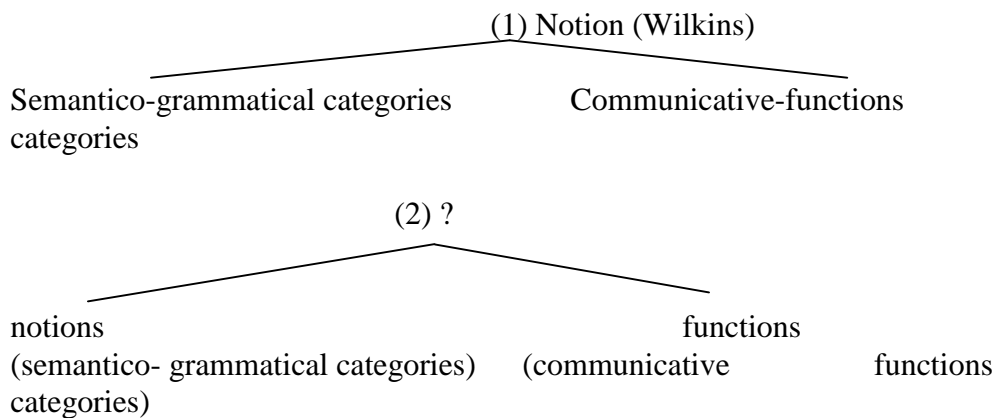Teaching English for 3rd Year English Department Students: Adventages and Weaknesses

communicative competence (Darjowidjojo, 1993:2). The learners are to consider the rules of use to produce language appropriate to particular situations and strategies for effective communication.

In the1980s, however, the approach was more concerned with the quality of interaction between learners and teachers rather than the specification of the syllabus and concentrated on classroom methodology than on content. It means that the teacher is no longer a teacher but a facilitator and a counselor. They are not only information-giver but also information-receiver. The instruction is no more teacher-centered but learner-centered. In short, it can be said that meaningfulness is what communicative approach is driving at (Sumardi, 1993:4).

There are some cases that are contradictive in the communicative approach. Some experts have their own point in viewing this communicative approach, namely:

a. The change of the outlook; the emphasis from form to meaning.

Wilkins (in Dardjowidjojo, 1993:3) introduces a new concept called notion. He gave no explicit definition to this term but only exposed that notion was a semantic element in a language. Meanwhile, others such as Jhonson and Morrow (1981) stated that notion was equivalent to concept. This controversial idea can be seen in the following diagram:
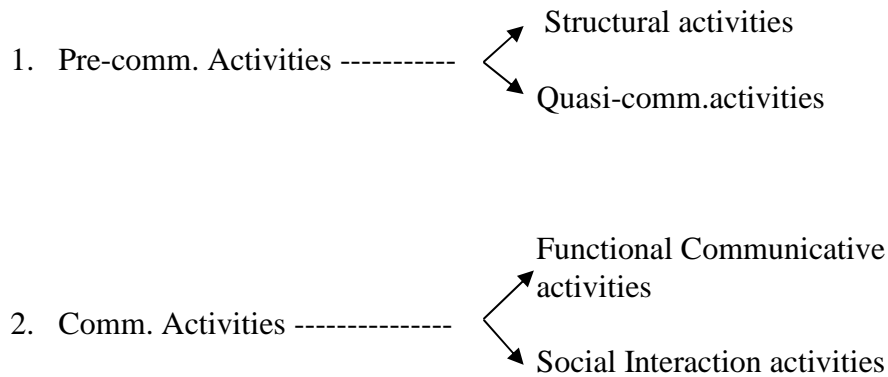
(1) Notion (Wilkins)

Semantico-grammatical categories   Communicative-functions
categories

(2) ?

notions   functions
(semantico- grammatical categories)   (communicative   functions
categories)

b. The communicative approach is considered identical with the notional function-syllabus.

Linguists such as Breen and Candlin (1980) believe that a syllabus must be based on called the need of the student. Therefore, the syllabus is to come out from the process negotiated between teacher and students. The Lancaster also believes that the syllabus does not only contain teaching materials, topics, and areas to be covered, but it must also include

methodology. On the other hand, linguists such as Widowson (1975) and Brumfit (2006) believe that a process of syllabus cannot possibly be applied on the notional level. With regards to the methodology, he holds the view that methodology must be separated from the syllabus.

c. The meaning of the Communicative Approach

Many people believe that the communicative approach is different from other previous approaches, particularly audio-lingual approach (AA). AA concentrates on teaching of grammatical whereas communicative approach to the teaching of notions and functions. If the literature of communicative approach is studied deeply, it will be found that what is truly called the communicative approach is not intended to replace the AA. Littlewood (1981) says that 'the structural view of language has not been in any way superseded by the functional view'. For that, he then made four divisions of communicative approach as displayed in the diagram below:

1. Pre-comm. Activities -----------
   Structural activities
   Quasi-comm.activities

2. Comm. Activities ---------------
   Functional Communicative activities
   Social Interaction activities

Analysis

Everything is of no perfectness in this world. There must be badness and goodness of it. As this approach, it also has good and bad sides. After being applied to the 3rd year-students of English Department Andalas University, it is found that there are some advantages of applying the communicative approach in teaching English. They are as follows:
a. The students may practice their English in real communication.
The 3rd year students of English Department students are regarded good enough at English. Their English proficiency is much better than the 1st and 2nd year. Even, their frequent contact with English and their keep speaking English in class as well as around campus may enhance their competence.
Besides, at English Department, all students who run their business with their lecturer at campus must speak English. This stimulation helps the students to improve their ability in English. For example is as follows.

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(1)   Student :   Mam, I would like to discuss my thesis with you?
      Lecturer: Will you wait for a moment? I still have thing to be done.

      Student :   Oke, Mam. May I wait in front of this room? Or…
      Lecturer: Ok!

    The conversation takes place in front of the post graduate meeting room. There is no compulsory for the students in this area to speak English. Unlike at the English Department where every student must use English in their interaction, this student tends to speak very slowly since she was afraid of making mistake. Seemingly, she thinks quite hard to arrange the sentence to be uttered. The rule the lecturer design that the students must use English wherever they talk about things related to academic activities. This rule is a kind of stimulation and implementation of communicative approach applied at class. As the rule is kept being obeyed, the competence of the students may be upgraded.

    This commitment is not only committed inside campus area but also outside. For some students who are eager to improve their skill in English, they are consistent to keep using English. This can be seen in the dialog 2 -3 below.

(2)   Lecturer: Hi!
      Student: Eh…Mom. Preparing for *Lebaran*, Mom?
      Lecturer: (Just smiling)
      Student: Are you alone, Mom? I don't see Anind, Faiz, and Aqeela.
      Lecturer: They are over there. Looking for the toys? You must be shopping for Lebaran? Buy many stuffs…
      Student: No, Mom. I just accompany my mother.

(3)   Student: Asssalamualaikum, Mom Ike.
      Lecturer: Waalaikumsalam. Hello!
      Student: You might forget me, Mom.
      Lecturer: (Smiling while thinking)
      Student: I am Marlina, your student from Sociolinguistic class.
      Lecturer: Oh ya….but Marlina which one?
      Student: Marlina who once you teased about 'roasted corn'.
      Lecturer: I see. Ups, sorry. You look very different.
      Student: Yes. Mom because I do not wear my veil now.

The conversation in dialog (2) takes place at supermarket in the city. The lecturer accidently met her English Department student. She firstly greeted that student who was busily looking for something. This student was a little bit surprised being greeted by this lecturer. However, she did not forget her English. She even kept communicating in English even though the topic and the place were not a formal (academic) setting. Even, she introduced her mother to the lecturer by using English.

This phenomena is quite similar with dialog (3) in which the student met her lecturer at swimming pool in a tourism object, far from the campus. The student still preferred English as the means to communicate with her lecturer. She did not care with the surrounding people who stared at them because they speak English in an area where almost ever body use local language and bahasa Indonesia. What the lecturer reminds is kept in her mind to keep speaking English, especially with those who are able to communicate with English.

b. The ability of the students to practice language in social context is getting better.

By having this kind of approach, the students know how to differentiate the use of language in different time, occasion, or place. For example is in the use of greeting or terms of addressee. The students are able to select the appropriate greeting in formal and informal situation. They can practice well the use of terms addressee in English even though in their daily conversation local language or *Bahasa Indonesia* is the preference. The examples are as follows.

(4) Student 1: **Good morning, Mam!**
Lecturer: Good morning! Are you waiting for someone?
Student: No, **Mam**. We have class at noon. While waiting for the time, we have discussion here.
Lecturer: Why don't you discuss at jurusan?
Student 2 : This place is much more comfortable, **Mam**.
Lecturer: Have a great discussion!
Student 1+2 : Thank you, **Mam**.

The conversation involved students and their lecturer. The students are discussing their course at the corridor of the campus. Corridor where they sit and gathered around is actually not a formal academic setting to discuss the course. Nonetheless, these students preferred sitting on the floor in the corridor to have an informal academic discussion. They feel more

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comfortable having discussion at corridor because of the view and the fresh air blowing around.

When a lecturer passed that corridor, the students greeted by using **Good morning, Mam!** This greeting is used because the situation is still in the morning. Furthermore, they use **Ma'am** to address their female lecturers. Different address term will be applied as the lecturer is male. They may use **Sir** or the degree of the lecturer, such as **Prof** as being seen in the dialog 5 and 6.

(5)　Student 1:　　**Excuse me, Sir!**
　　　Lecturer :　　Yes. What is it?
　　　Student　:　　I just want to give this to you. Mr. X asked me to give this to you, Sir.
　　　Lecturer :　　Oke. Thank you. And you…anything I can do?
　　　Student 2 :　　**No, Sir.** I just accompany her.

(6)　Student 1:　　**Prof, Mam Rina told me that I must give this to you.**
　　　Lecturer:　　Just put it there! Thank you.
　　　Student:　　You are welcome, **Prof**.

(7)　Student 1 :　　**Good afternoon, Mom!**
　　　Student 2 :　　**Good afternoon, Mom!**
　　　Lecturer:　　Good afternoon! Going home?

For the dialog 7, the students are not only able to use the correct greeting but also the appropriate addressee. They use **Mom** instead of **Mam** to the lecturer. In dialog 6, the student used **Mam.** The term **Mom** and **Mam** has different meaning when it is addressed. Socially, the term **Mom** indicates the intimacy and commonly used to address those who are less than 40 year old unlike **Mam** which is likely used to address those whose age are 40+. The lecturer in dialog 7 is still young. She is around 35 years old. It means that, **Mom** is much more appropriate than **Mam.**

c.　The tendency of students to seek the real example about notion which is poured into text or conversation.

The students tend to find the factual example in which the communicative function of language may be reached. The example may derive from the current issue about politics or things related to what the youth like. For example is as being seen in the data 8 – 10 below.

(8)   Student :   **…Social media can be a means to make us more qualified. There are many facilities provided by this social media. This all depends on us. How to use this technology positively…**

(9)   Student :   **Not all things can be uttered. There must be things to be implicitly expressed. As Minangkabau people, for example, we must think deeply before saying what we want to say. This is in accordance with Minangkabau proverb *mangango sabalaum mengecek*. Open your mouth before speaking. Philosophically, this proverb reminds us to keep one's face in communicating…**

(10)   Student :   **…The current issue about the politicians that many of them make some commitments when they were in campaign. As they were elected, what they promised is forgotten. The regarded as things gone with the wind…** This phenomena is one example of the commissive speech act. The speaker that is the politician is supposed to commit with their commitment. This commitment occurs in the future.

The three data 8-10 are uttered by students who are having class discussion with different topics. These utterances are related to the questions given by their friends. The students, then, try to relate the answer to the updated phenomena, like social media, the aspect of impoliteness, and the current issue about the attitude of politicians.

The communicative approach applied in the class help the students to extend their discussions to the current issue. As youngsters, the students know much about social reality which they use as supporting information when they have a discussion. By giving them chance to speak communicatively, the students have many ideas to say. Every words uttered will also run smoothly.

The implementation of communicative approach in teaching English in some cases not only helps students to seek the updated issue, but also stimulate students to upgrade themselves with the information. It is impossible for them to speak unless they have many information in mind. This situation can be a good tip for English teacher who also have to teach content subject for undergraduate students. Communicative approach is

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helpful to encourage students to read and/or converse (even debate in class discussion).

d. By applying this approach, the final function of using language namely for communication can be achieved.

This advantage is in line with what Dument (in Zainil, 1990:6) says that:

The prime objective of EFL Programs is not merely linguistic competence but communicative competence, or what might be called intercultural communicative competence.

The students may run the function of language as a means of communication through this approach without having to always fear whether their grammar is correct or not. This approach helps students to focus on communicating their ideas rather than constantly conscious on correcting their grammar.

The implementation of communicative approach brings the students to be able to speak communicatively. They purchase the communicative aspect in communication without being scared of making grammatical mistake as being seen in the below example 10-15.

(10)   Student :   Thank you for the time. **I am want** to try to answer the question from Lucy. As we know that in our daily life, no matter what we do, who we are, we need language to communicate. Language is used to communicate. **We** as human being **are depend** on language. As social creature, **we are need** language…

(11)   Student :   Thank you for the question. I will try to answer Rima's question. **In here**, what we want to say is…

(12)   Student :   **…we can to do** that …

(13)   Student :   …**It is happened** here, in this class. As the young generation, **we (…) expected** to do much to improve our society. That is our responsibility…

(14)   Student :   …**The data is** from a movie titled**…** I have my own reason to choose that movie as source of data.

The most important thing is that there **many utterance** containing my data in the dialog of the characters…

(15)   Student :   **The main character play** very important position in the society….Another example is **we as non-native of English is possible…**

These data 10 -15 occurred in class as the students have discussion with their friends. Some grammatical errors are found in their utterances. Because these utterances are orally delivered, the students tend to ignore the grammar. What they focus is the message and information only.

Grammatically, there are some aspects that are quite often disobeyed by the students, like the use of tenses as reflected in data 10. Some verbs are not allowed to be in progressive form, such as *want* and *need*. These two verbs cannot be in progressive tense but present one. In fact, the student still produce "**I am want"** and "**we are need."** The S-V agreement is also inconsistently done where the student produced sentence like "**We** as human being **are depend"** while the correct form should be "**we depend on"** or **we are depending on"**.

Another grammatical aspect that has seemingly been ignored by students is related to singular and plurality. Some students fail to identify whether those nouns are plural or singular. For example in utterance (14) where the word "**data"** is plural and must be followed by **to be are.** This is in line with the next utterance where the quantifier **many** must be followed by plural noun. In fact, the student missed the plural marker **–s** for the word **utterance**. The correct form should be **many utterances** instead of **many utterance**.

From some observations done, there is a tendency of students to think of the sentence in their mother tongue. Consequently, the utterances sound *Indolish* (Indonesian-English). This can be seen in data (11) and (12). The use of preposition **in here** which the students mean **here** (in Bahasa Indonesia is *di sini*). They translate it word by word. *Di sini* in English is **here.** They, then, are not supposed to add preposition **in** before adverb of place **here**. Similarly, in the case of utterance (12) in which the verb **happened** is passivized. Without being passivized, **happened** already means *terjadi*. Cultural interferences occur in these utterances.

After having some observations and interviewing some students, this communicative approach has some weaknesses as well. There are three weaknesses identified. They are as follows.

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a. The communicative approach concentrates too much on meaning and disregards forms.

This produces the speaker of the tourist level-able to get around with grammar worse than pidgin. For example, '*I can to do…*', '*In here, I am will…*' These types of mistake are ignored by the students since communication is commonly defined as interchangeable understanding on meaning. They disobey any grammatical rules for the sake of communicative goal. Other examples are as being displayed in dialog 16-17 below.

(16) Student 1 :   I want to ask **group first**….
      Student 2 :   Thank you for the question. Do you mean that the question is addressed to first or second group?...

(17) Student :   …when **we first** come to this campus, we think that being college students is something … **I am now realize** that it is not hard to reach my dream…

The main goal of communicative approach is for communicative function. Language as a means of communication is mainly used for delivering idea of speakers. This mindset then makes the speaker disobey the form. Their focus is on meaning or message only. This is shown by dialog (16) – (17) above where students forgot the structure of English that head follows modifier. Thus, **group first** must be **first group** since the head is **group** and modifier is **first.**

The use of adverb as verb modifier is sometimes failed being implemented. As the utterance (17) shows that **we first** should be **we firstly** because **firstly** is adverb that modifies verb. It must be added with -**ly**. The S-verb disagreement is most commonly used by many students. This does not mean that they do not know the grammar. However, in this utterance, they are focusing more on meaning rather than the form.

b. The students tend to assume that learning grammar is less important and useless.

Some expressions can be grammatically wrong, but it is still kept on process since the addressee care less of such incorrectness. Other students understand what the speaker means. Thus, the wrong grammatical is undergoing (Terrel in Dardjowidjojo, 1993:10). For example '*We discuss this topic since last week*.' This sentence is understandable, but grammatically unacceptable. Language teaching should also aim at making students internalize both the form and meaning. Language teaching includes

the process of learning internal aspect of language as well as external ones. Learning English covers both langue and parole.

In line with this, Papalia (1976) says that:

Communicative proficiency depends on linguistic competence, discourse, cultural inference, and strategic functions as well as interactional use of the language in the social context.

This quotation clearly states that language learners do not only learn the internal aspect of language, like grammar, but also the external one, such as context. They must know both langue and parole.

Factually, some English learners only obey one aspect and disobey another one. Consequently, they do not care about grammatical mistake they have made. There is an assumption among some students that as long as the hearer understands what they are telling, the communication can still going on.

When this mind is consistently applied, the English learners may miss their competence in grammatical aspect. They will then no longer regarded as making grammatical mistake, but error. Their consistent production of wrong grammar will then become a mind set. They students might regard grammar as less important that lead them to think that grammar is not important in verbal communication. Moreover, the hearers successfully catch the message they want to deliver. This can be seen in dialog 18-20 below.

(18)　Student 1 :　　Mer….!Mer…!
　　　Student 2 :　　What is it?
　　　Student 1 :　　Are you busy now?
　　　Student 2 :　　No. I am going down town. What's up?
　　　Student 1 :　　I need Leech's book. **Can you borrow it to me?**

(19)　Student 1 :　　…I don't understand with group explanation. For me, **the group only copy paste from the internet…**
　　　Student 2 :　　So, what is your question?
　　　Student 1 :　　I just want to give comment about that. No question. Thank you.

(20)　Student 1 :　　Excuse me, Mam. I want to **speak to** you. Do you have time, Mam?
　　　Lecturer :　　Can you see me after this class?
　　　Student 1:　　Thank you, Mam. I just want to **discuss about** my thesis.

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There are some words that may trap the speakers when they use their own locality to think. For example is the word **borrow** (meminjam in Bahasa Indonesia) vs **lend** (meminjamkan). The above context demands the use of verb **lend** instead of **borrow.** What the speaker means is that the hearer lends her the book and she borrows the hearer's book. However, she uses a wrong diction.

This is similar with dialog 19 where student 1 combine the verbs "**copy"** and "**paste**." Grammatically, the second verb must be with –ing becoming **pasting**. Since, his concept is in Bahasa Indonesia and the hearer also understands what he is saying, he continues producing grammatically wrong sentence.

In dialog (20), the students fail to use appropriate preposition to verb **speak** and **discuss**. Some verbs in English have their own preposition or without any preposition. **Speak** is commonly juxtaposed with **with** and **discuss,** in the above context, the verb speak does not need the preposition **with**. Such grammatical mistakes commonly found in English learners utterance/sentence. The grammar lecturers always remind student with these mistakes. Still, they repeat similar mistake at different time. Even, this is constantly done in their academic writing.

c. Some students who have lack of competence and vocabularies tend to be silent.

Some students are psychologically handicapped to communicate by using English. This is due to their feeling anxious speaking in front of others. Lacking of vocabulary and worrying of being laughed at and mocked by their peers, and having to plan and monitor their speech discourage students to speak in English. Most of the students, therefore, prefer to be listeners than a speaker. For those who dare to speak, conversing in a mixture of English and their mother tongue is a strategy for communicating in the classroom. For example is as being shown in the following dialog 21-23.

(21)	Lecturer :	What is your understanding about Natural Semantics Metalanguage?
	Student 1:	Is it about meaning of words of different language, Mam? In my understanding, Natural Semantics Metalanguage is also called NSM. **It is *semacam pendekatan* gitu, Mam. For example, sky in English…*Boleh Bahasa Indonesia*, Mam?**
	Lecturer :	Can you use English? What about you?
	Student 2:	Thank you, Mam. NSM is a kind of approach,

Mam. Every language has term for certain thing. English has I, She, He **yang sama artinya dengan Indonesian** *saya…*

(22) Lecturer : Choose one topic that you know most, then you explain!

        Student 1: I choose Presupposition, Mam. ***Boleh Bahasa Indonesia, Mam?***

        Lecturer : Are you English Department student? It means that try to use English as far as you can.

        Student 1: ***Susah, Mam***.

These two dialogs occur in the exam room where the students are having their oral final exam. As the lecturer asks them questions that they do not know much, they bargain to do the explanations with a mixture of English and *Bahasa Indonesia*. Even, when they are given to explain something they know quite well, still they persuade the teachers to allow them to use their mother tongue. This is due to their lack of vocabularies. Besides, the psychological aspect also contributes to this choice of code-mixing and code-switching. Being examined orally also puts great pressure to the students English production.

Moreover, some students are not used to speak English in public area (English Department). Even though the rule has already designed that English Department students must use English to communicate, especially in certain communicative purposes (especially for academic purpose). Lack of competence and mastery of vocabularies prevent their willingness to speak English.

CONCLUSION

There are some methods to be used in teaching English in Non-English speaking countries. Each approach in language teaching has its own uniqueness. In this study, this is quite true for the communicative approach.

The communicative approach is an attempt to make communicative competence becomes the goal of this teaching context. Communicative approach in some cases is still regarded as the most effective way since it is acquired through communication. It is therefore not merely a question of activating an existing but also inert knowledge of language. This, then, becomes its weak version in which communicative approach stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purpose.

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The weaknesses can be overcome by the instructor or lecturer conducting the class. Well planned classroom management and language instructions may reduce the three aspects of communicative approach weaknesses. Thus, communicative approach may become the alternative of teaching English for advanced learners or even the beginners.

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