



HABIT OF MIND AS REFLECTED IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS RESEARCH: AN ANALYSIS OF THESES WRITING BY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN EFL TEACHER EDUCATION

by

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Abstract

Habits of mind refers to collective thoughts shared by the members of a community which covers three aspects, they are the nature of knowledge and knowing the language, method of knowledge development, and rhetoric for the knowledge communication. Habits of minds develop as a result of learning. Personal belief governs the learning. Habits of minds or collective thought of Applied Linguistics researcher community shared by the undergraduate students of EFL education are incomplete. This is indicated by the errors, mistake and misleading they made in writing the titles, research problems, review of related literature, research designs, subjects of the study, significances of the study, conceptual framework, data analysis, conclusions and suggestions. Habit of mind of the undergraduate students develops and the determinant factor of this development is personal belief of the students. Speeding up the acquisition of the habit of minds should be started from encouraging positive personal belief.

Keywords: Habits of mind, Applied Linguistics, Collective thoughts, Personal belief, Community.

Introduction

Habit of mind is a thought style practiced by a group of people or a community in doing certain thing. Members of a community sharing a thought style practice the same way of thinking, the same procedures of doing and the same patterns of communicating. The process of sharing thought style occurs through learning by its members to be. Sufficiently getting shared with the thought style is a prerequisite for one to be naturally accepted as members of the community.



In doing applied linguistics, a group of people or a community of this field share thought style relating to two different things, namely related to applied linguistics and to research methodology. Thought style within the community members can have variations of thought style due to the imperfect research mastery of the nature of Applied Linguistics and research methodology. These variations cover research validity, procedures of doing the research and communicative patterns among this field community.

Applied Linguistics is perceived differently among its community members. These differences are resulted from different scholars' perception. Schmitt (2010) perceives that Applied Linguistics is a discipline of which investigation involves the application of knowledge of the nature of language and its learning to other field for the purpose of solving real life problems in the field. This implicitly states that understanding what Applied Linguistics is requires comprehension of three key words, (1) knowledge of the nature of language and the nature of learning a language, (2) application of the knowledge in other field or other discipline, and (3) the purpose of the application. With the three key words, variations of application of the theory of language can be illustrated as follows.

Research methods used in Applied Linguistics are quantitative, qualitative, action research, and mixed method.

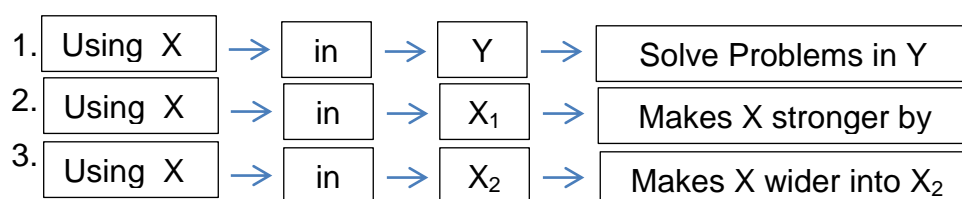


Figure 1. Variations in the application of Linguistics theory

In Figure1, X is knowledge of languages or Linguistics theories; Y is other discipline, other than Linguistics, such as *teaching, translation, technology, language, etc.*, to solve the problem in Y. X₁ refers to other part of of a language (language X) to verify the theory of X, while X₂ refers to other local language, dialect, etc in order to find out if the X is true in X₂.



Figure 1 shows that concept of *problem* is different in the three variations. The difference depends on *other field* or discipline to which the knowledge of language (X) is applied. The closest concept of *problem*, as it is found in its lexical meaning, is in variation one. It offers solution to the problem in Y. However, whether the solution is direct or indirect - just provides contribution to the solution – is not easily identified. Some of the solution are practical and some just provides contribution to the solution. Li (2009.) argued that the application of knowledge of language (X) in speech pathology does not provide direct solution to a child speech problem. The child's parents go to consult speech therapist rather than consulting expert in Applied Linguistics. In the field of language teaching, the application of knowledge of language or Linguistic theory to the discipline *teaching languages* provides solution which is more practical to the problem; especially in writing the syllabus. It is also true to facilitating language learning. The application of linguistic theory in teaching techniques facilitates language learning more than not applying the theory.

Research methods used in Applied Linguistics research are quantitative, qualitative, action research, and mixed method. The selection of these methods to use depends on the purpose of the researchers and the nature of the object to be researched. This article is limited to qualitative method.

Qualitative research is used to obtain new theory or to find out how a theory works or applies in a different phenomenon. This method provides a researcher with two alternatives, namely to do a research with the available theory and find a new phenomenon to which the theory is applied for the purpose of either confirming the theory or modifying it. This model is called *theory application design*. The second alternative is to start a research without using any theory, or using the theory, but very loosely for the purpose of finding new theory. In applying this design, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), a researcher starts by deciding a topic to research then going to the field for many times in order to get the topic more focused. This is known as modified analytic induction. Another way of practicing this design is by deciding a topic too, and do the observation but not for getting the topic more focused, but for more elaborated characterization of the topic. This is done by doing



comparison of the topic in different contexts repeatedly. This design is known as constant comparative design.

With the two types of qualitative research designs, the role of theory is very basic. Without mastering a theory one is not able to design a qualitative research with high validity. Research design is defined as general description of what to do in the research ranging from formulating research problems, research title, deciding subjects, data, data collection, data analysis, doing discussion of the findings, drawing conclusion, and making suggestions. This indicates that theory has very important role in qualitative research.

According to Young (2018) Applied Linguistics research can be researched with different methods, like qualitative method, quantitative method, and action research. All of these methods are different in terms of language they use, concept of knowledge and method used to obtain the knowledge, and the choice of the suitable methods. Each of these methods has its own language characterized with different terms and jargons. The nature of knowledge, like for example, what *teaching* is, is different in these methods, therefore the choice of these methods has to suit with the nature of the knowledge. Such differences are caused by different way of looking (paradigm) the applied linguistics. Teaching, for example, based on quantitative paradigm, is viewed as single reality, and, therefore terms like *generalization*, *sample*, *population*, *etc.* are used to communicate quantitative research. On the other hand, in qualitative research, based on its paradigm, different terms are used such as *subjects* instead of *sample*, *accumulation* rather than *generalization*, *etc.*

Undergraduate students of EFL education and their thesis writing supervisors are the community members of Applied Linguistics researchers. As the members of this community, they have the same habit of mind. They share the same though style dealing with what knowledge of applied linguistics is, what characterizes this knowledge, and how this knowledge is obtained, and how to communicate their findings in this knowledge. However, levels of their membership may be different from one member to the others depending on how much they have shared the nature of the knowledge, research method and communication or rhetoric. Some of



them may be considered as beginner members of the community, and others may be classified as advanced members. How the undergraduate students do the applied linguistic research, how they communicate their findings, and how the thesis writing supervisors communicate their thought style in the thesis defence examination are the foci of this article.

Method

This study was conducted by applied qualitative research design by which the undergraduate students' habits of minds were described and unravel the factors underlying the habit of mind described. The subjects of this study were the undergraduate students of EFL teacher education in an English Department of a Faculty of language in Medan, North Sumatera Indonesia. The habits of minds of these students were indicated by their shared collective thoughts in Applied Linguistics, research methods and rhetoric of communication used. Based on these indications, the data of the study were the topics studied in their theses, the titles, research problems, review of related literature, research designs, subjects of the study, significances of the study, conceptual framework, data analysis, conclusions and suggestions. The sources of these data were the Applied Linguistics theses of the undergraduate students written with qualitative methods. These data were collected by documenting the theses. The number of theses documented was based on the data saturation or data recurrences. These data were analyzed by applying data analysis proposed by Bogdan and Biklen (1992). With this model, the data were identified by taking the theory in Applied Linguistics and qualitative research method.

Findings

The undergraduate habits of minds as found in their Applied Linguistics theses showed that as members of this community they have not yet shared perfect collective thoughts of the community. The theses works were difficult to understand by other members of the community including by the theses writing supervisors. The



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imperfect collective thoughts shared of the students were due to the imperfect mastery of knowledge of Applied Linguistics and qualitative research methods. Based on these findings, membership of a community or collective thoughts is developing and habits of minds grow towards perfect shared of collective thoughts.

The imperfect habits of mind shared by the undergraduate students are reflected in the titles, research problems, review of related literature, research designs, subjects of the study, significances of the study, conceptual framework, data analysis, conclusions and suggestions.

The two phenomena written in the title did not show the theoretical gap which promises the modification or confirmation of the theory based on which the research was conducted. Consequently, the review of related literature became uncontrolled, as if it were separated from the new phenomenon written in the research title. Chapter two, in which related literature was reviewed, was treated as separated part from other parts of the theses. Further consequences of the misleading between the two phenomena in the research title as well as their theoretical relationship elaborated in chapter two are dull research problems, inaccurate elaboration of the significance of the study, wrong depiction of conceptual framework, inexact elaboration of discussion, biased conclusion and unrelated suggestions. The growth of habit of minds in collective thought of a community seems to depend on the mastery of the nature of the knowledge, in this case the knowledge of Applied Linguistics, how the knowledge is developed; especially the knowledge of research methods – in this case qualitative research method - ranging from the purpose it aims at up to how suggestions should be given and how the knowledge is communicated.

Discussion

Habits of minds are affected by collective thought shared among the members of a community in certain field. Community of researchers in Applied Linguistics, including the undergraduate students of EFL teacher candidates, shared collective thought. According to Young (2018) habits of minds shared from a collective thought of community are reflected in three aspects, they are shared language or jargons,



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shared nature of knowledge and method of developing the knowledge, and shared knowledge of how to select suitable research method for developing the knowledge.

Researchers of Applied Linguistics, including beginner researchers, such as the undergraduate students, shared knowledge of the community collective thoughts in three aspects, as Young (2018) stated. Since they are b

Beginner members of this community, the collective thoughts they share are limited. The results of the present study showed that the undergraduate students EFL teacher education share incomplete mastery of knowledge of the nature of applied linguistics knowledge, knowledge of qualitative research methods and community language, such as standard use of terms or jargons. The incompleteness shared knowledge are realized in inappropriate writing of research titles, research problems, review of related literature, research designs, subjects of the study, significances of the study, conceptual framework, data analysis, conclusions and suggestions.

Fludernik (2015) searched for knowledge shared among the writers of modern narratives. In the narratives the writers wrote, there are recurrent knowledge used by all of the writers. Among all the narratives they wrote, there are some similarities which reflect the collective thoughts of the narrative writers. This implicitly states that narrative writers belong to a community of modern narrative writers who shared knowledge of narration, ways of writing narration and ways of communicating the their thought through the narration. This also indicated that in order to find out the existence of habit of mind, the work of the community members can be investigated since this work should be the reflection of the community habit of mind. From this point of view, the fact that the undergraduate students' habit of mind is investigated from the applied linguistics theses they wrote are able to depict how much the knowledge of the community they share in term of knowledge of applied linguistics, research methods and language used to communicate the knowledge.

Lilis and Scot (2008) doubted whether *academic literacy* is a field of study. By investigating works classified as academic works they came to conclusion that *academic literacy* is a field of study since it has specific characteristics which make it



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different from other forms of literacy, like literature and rhetoric. It has specific genres, it is regarded as knowledge, and it has specific terms. This implies that the writers of academic works shared the knowledge specifically related to academic literacy. The writers have knowledge in common dealing with the nature of academic literacy, methods of developing the knowledge and ways of communicating the knowledge to others. With such conception, writers of academic literacy belong to the same community who share the same conception of the literacy, ways of developing the literacy and ways of communicating the literacy. Applied Linguistics has specific characteristics which are different from other kinds of linguistics. It is an interdisciplinary subject. The knowledge of language and language learning is applied to other disciplines for the purpose of solving practical problem. The undergraduate students are considered to be a member of Applied Linguistics researcher if they share the knowledge of discipline.

Hofer (2001) analyzed some researches investigating students' belief about the nature of knowledge and how they know the knowledge. The analysis aims at finding an individual's definition of knowledge and how he or she knows the knowledge. Based on the results of his analysis, Hofer (2001), offered a term: *personal epistemology* as a cover term for various phrases used to refer to this construct in the researches he analyzed. Personal epistemology refers to two components, they are individual's definition of knowledge and how the individual comes to know the knowledge. Personal epistemology is an individual's belief about the two components. Such belief governs an individual in selecting learning ways applied to learn the knowledge, determining cognitive manner used to proceed the knowledge and changing the conception of learning.

Such personal belief discovered by Hofer (2001) provides insights why the undergraduate students of EFL education do not share as incomplete habits of minds as shared among the members of Applied Linguistics research community. The data analysis of the present study showed that habits of minds or collective thoughts among the undergraduate students develop. Hofer 's (2001) finding can also be taken into consideration to understand the finding better. Personal belief,



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according to Hofer (2001), develops over time and this belief affect learning ways, cognitive process and changing of learning concept. The development of personal belief can be a determinant factor for the development of habits of mind or collective thoughts.

Conclusion

The undergraduate students' habits of minds develop towards perfect shared knowledge of Applied Linguistics research community. The development is affected by their personal beliefs towards their knowledge of the nature of Applied Linguistics, research methods suitable for the development of Applied Linguistics knowledge, and language used for the communication of Applied Linguistics knowledge. Learning the knowledge, methods, and rhetoric of Applied Linguistics research determines how well the undergraduate students shared the community's habits of mind or collective thoughts. Personal belief, on the other hand, affects learning strategies and cognitive process. Therefore, personal belief is identified as determinant factor for fast acquisition of shared knowledge of the community habits of minds. Incomplete shared knowledge of the community's habits of minds causes low quality of the undergraduates' Applied Linguistics research.

Faster acquisition of shared collective thoughts or habits of mind of Applied Linguistics research community should be attempted in order to improve the undergraduate students' quality of Applied Linguistics research; and such attempts should be started from encouraging positive personal belief about the knowledge of Applied Linguistics nature, research method and rhetoric. For this purpose, facilitative learning environments should be created, effective teaching techniques should be applied, and instructional materials matched with their existing schemata should be developed.



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