LANGUAGE UNIVERSALS AND UNIVERSAL INPUT CONDITIONS
(SIUSANA KWELDJU)

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Abstract

This essay discusses about human language, human have the common system in their language. The same system of the languages is called as Language Universals. it can be assumed that Language Universals or known as Linguistic Universals is a pattern that occurs systematically across natural languages.

Key Words: *Language, Input and Condition*

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1. Introduction

Language universals deal with universal properties of human language. Specifically, they deal with what is possible and what is impossible in human languages. In these properties enable languages to change but they also have limitations of the variations. Adults could not learn their first or second language just by observing the language without any innate properties they have in their brain. For example, Dogs and cats can never acquire the language they hear every day. While, the environment only function as the triggering and shaping potentials (Chomsky, 1980,p.33)

II. Discussion

2.1 Universals And Second Language Learners' Problematic Areas

Gass and ard (1982) propose six types of language universal, Five of them yield potential influences on adult second language acquisition. The first one refer to the physical constrains, or the constrains of human body. This term is used without including the linguistic and the neurological phenomena. For example, the phonetic universals is due to the constrains of vocal and aural organs.

The second type refers to influences of human perceptual and cognitive apparatus. Actually these influences affect more than language abilities. First language development, for example, is closely related to cognitive and perceptual development. The third and fourth sources are respectively due to the language acquisition device and the neurophysiological apparatus, which specify themselves for language use. The fifth source is related to the nature of human social interaction. In its linguistic aspect, its deal with communicative competence and pragmatic competence as a part of interactive competence.

There are two kind of universal, absolute universal and universal tendency. absolute universals are related to the physical constrains. The universal tendency. However, reflects a significant fact that ninety-nine percent of languages adhere to the universals. While less than one percent go against them. As long as second language acquisition is concerned, statistical universals are more relevant to discuss than the absolute universals.

No variations can be expected in the absolute universals. For example, we can not expect the nasal trills in any languages, as they are simply physically impossible. Consequently, second language learners do not have to bother themselves with these non existing linguistics elements.

The statistical universals deal with variations among languages. A second language learner will even find the unmarked elements to be easier to acquire although the element do not exist in his first language (Berent, 1997; Connors, 1988; Santos, 1987;Rutherford, 1982). More marked properties. On the other hand, are acquired less easily. For example, although voicing is physically possible, devoicing is more common among languages. Indonesian speakers will find it difficult to voice final obstruent in English. On the contrary, English speakers learning Indonesian will find devoicing easy to manipulate (Kumplf, 1982).

2.2 Markedness Theory Indonesian Speakers Learning English

Eckman, (1997) markedness deals with either what is more or less common. It has been introduced to explain the problems of second language acquisition since a decade ago. The more common is the parameter of universal grammar or core grammar and the less common is its extension or the marked periphery. Markedness itself consists of different degrees. Languages are organized in different layers from the practically invariant core to the extreme periphery. At which point languages naturally differ a great deal. In other words, plasticity increases towards the periphery.

Core grammar is the maximally learnable part or the unmarked part of the language, as it is deeply entrenched in human body. The periphery is the rule that is outside core grammar. It is defined as the additional features for the construction. For example, plural needs additional feature compare to singular. Passive sentences need one more feature compared to negative sentences. Rutherford (1984) claims that second language acquisition emerges from the unmarked structures to the marked ones, because the easier will be tried first by learners (Eckman, 1997; Gass, 1979; mazurkewich, 1984). Language learning in this view is the fixing of the parameters of core grammar, plus the addition of marked rules up to the periphery (Koster, 1978).

Concerning Indonesian speakers' acquisition of English, Kweldju (1989) in her case study found that her marked items tend to

be problematic for Indonesian learners. The items investigated include three morphemes and three syntactic items. The morphemes are tense marker, plural marker, and third person singular marker. The syntactic items are passive, conditional construction, and questions both the WH - and yes/no.

During the acquisition process the problem caused by marked form may predominantly occur in the early interlanguage. These problems may also be likely to persist, and to remain as a candidate for fossilization (Selinker, 1972). This tendency is also noticeable in the utterances of Indonesian speakers learning English. An advanced learner of English who happened to be a lecturer of English language, and had been living for several years in English speaking countries still had some problems with marked contractions, especially conditional construction.

2.3 Input as a factor

It seems that the problem of acquiring marked item is also common among Indonesian speakers. Not only may it occur to those with lower competence of English with no professional back-ground of English, but also with an advanced learner who has been trying to polish his English in English-speaking countries. Although it would not perfectly be reasonable to learn too heavily on a case study of three subjects, Kweldju's (1989) case study tend to indicate that marked items are difficult to acquire by motivated Indonesian learners in the target environment.

Second language acquisition is a process of observing the regularities of the

input, formulates hypotheses, test them with following input and revises them (Schachter, 1986). Thus, increasing awareness is increasing the learners' awareness of testing their hypotheses, and revising them.

There must be an input requirement which enables this awareness to occur.

    a.   Positive Input

Positive input can be stated as the features in a language which has same features in another language. That is why it named as a positive one. In learning second language, positive input plays its role as the supporting features to acquire or learning any languages. For example, a language use a subject and a verb to construct a sentence. It may be has the same features in other languages.

    b.   Negative Input

Negative input is defined as the error which got used to by the learners. Schachter (1984) proposes negative input to fulfill this requirement and names it as the universal input condition.

Negative input is information provided to the learner indicating that his utterance is in some way unacceptable to native speakers. For example, it is ungrammatical, in appropriate, or confusing. How can a learner be aware that these following sentences are deviant in English without being told "he does not wish any gift". It is the best which I have ever met". And " look. The baby talks to the dog"?

Negative input has been considered discouraging and has been avoided for classroom practices. Day at al (1981) provide the evidence that ninety percent of second language learners' that occurring errors during their interaction are not corrected. At this point, it needs to be stressed that negative input has been associated with criticism, but it should also be realized that second language learners also welcome direction for their own progress.

lll. Conclusion

Human beings have innate properties that make language acquisition possible. There are two kinds of universals, absolute universals and universal tendency. Absolute universals only deal with core grammar, but universal tendency deals with both core and periphery grammar. These two areas are realized as the marked and unmarked forms. Indonesian speakers learning English also find marked forms difficult to acquire in spite of the rich environment where the acquisition take place. The result of the closer investigation to this environment suggest that native input as the universal input condition should be made to increase learners' awareness of marked items. However, it should also be investigated further what kind of negative input is appropriate for Indonesian learners learning English.

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