

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE AWARENESS ON GRAMMAR LEARNING IN INDONESIAN EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract

The study aimed at investigating the affective role of integrating language awareness into grammar learning in the Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context. In the study, questionnaires and interviews on language awareness were given to fifty participants. The findings show that majority of the participants responded to positively change their perceptions of the relationship between learning grammar and language skills. The conclusion underlines the necessity of language awareness in grammar learning in the Indonesian EFL context as well as its future development to facilitate second/foreign language teaching and learning.

Keywords: *language awareness, EFL context, grammar learning*

Introduction

Language awareness includes knowledge of language. It is applied in linguistics, psychology, and learning theories. Recent developments showed that language awareness is as pedagogic consisting of theory and practice. Language awareness have subscribed to belief that it has functions when a language is used. It is assumed that language awareness is likely acting as “language windows” (Hawkins, 1984, 1987, 1992, 2005) to provide learners with pictures of language they are learning, as a “language bridge” (Hawkins, 1984, 1987, 1999) to lead their way of language learning, and as “a door” to improve the learners competence, especially in literary and linguistic competence (Carter, 2007). Language awareness gives learners advantages in learning in which five combination domains of language learning are developed. The domains are affective, cognitive, power, social, and performance (James &Garrett, 1991; Garrette & James, 2004; van Lier, 1995, 1998).

Not only in daily communication, but also in English Language Teaching (ELT) process, language awareness is needed to make true sense. Instead of

mechanical 'fill in the blanks' or 'write the passive form' exercises in the textbook, animated videos bring flexibility and choice in teaching. Along with this, videos help contextualizing the language items. Nevertheless, the important thing that becomes disputation in ELT is grammar. Everyone has different argument about this aspect. In one side argues that using language is the understanding each other. Meanwhile, grammar is not needed as long as they understand. In other side argues that grammar is important to make sense, more perfect and easy to understand. English itself consists at least of sound, lexicon and grammar, Ellis (1994). If three of those elements influence each other, it will make meaningful language system. However, the benefits of language awareness pedagogy on ELT remain speculations, and classroom-based research into its applicability and practicability. Therefore, the study was to answer the following two research questions:

- a. To what extent may the participants apply different strategies for grammar learning?
- b. To what extent may the participants change their perceptions of the relationship between learning grammar and language skills?

Theoretical Review

Language Awareness as Pedagogic Methodology

Language awareness is as mental and internal capacity for learner to use language. Then, language awareness as a pedagogic methodology is described by two characteristics. Firstly, it is supposed that language awareness pedagogy enables teachers and learners to learn more about the language that they want to learn, whereas they cannot learn it alone (Bolitho et al., 2003). Depending on that characteristic, language awareness as a pedagogic or educational approach makes learners know more about language that they want to learn and knows how language works (Noble, 2012). Besides, language awareness has connection with mental processes. They increase motivation and attention on using certain language, and enable learners to change understanding into how language works. It is also a pedagogic approach that aims at helping learners to gain insights (Bolitho et al., 2003).

Secondly, language awareness's instruction is characterized as a linguistic approach to language (Farrell & Patricia, 2005). Such approach, according to Carter (2007), language awareness is not always about the level of linguistic form, but should include awareness of social and individual function of language. The same thing also pointed out by Svalberg (2007) that language awareness is as pedagogic methodology if one can be aware and draw on education, social theory, and linguistics. Hence, language awareness as pedagogic methodology is defined as how people use certain language naturally.

In addition, language awareness is concerned on how often learners use it (Andrews, 2005), especially the using of learners' cognitive learning strategies, such as discovering the language, analyzing/parsing the target language, comparing the differences and similarities between the target language and their mother tongue while constantly facing with language, and reflecting language use (Zhang & Hung, 2014). Such cognitive development may lead learners to be more independent in their learning and then facilitate language acquisition (Sharwood-Smith, 1981). In other words, the development of language awareness in second/foreign language teaching may result in a principled process or mechanism to allow learners to exploit their knowledge about the target language for communication, learning purpose (Papaefthymioy-Lytra, 1987), language capabilities (Tomlinson, 2005), and linguistic/literary competence (Carter, 2003, 2007).

Grammar as Language Pedagogy

There are three attitudes of grammar in English (Stern, 1992) as first language (L1), English as second language (L2), English as foreign language (LF). First, 'anti-grammarians' argue that grammar is not too needed both in L1 and L2/LF, because it just gives a little function to them. In L1, particularly in Western Europe, it is assumed that learning grammar could prevent learning and did not help the learner to communicate well. As the first language, it is assumed that grammar makes L1 learners do not have confidence during discussion in an acceptable manner. In L2/LF situations, learners will focus on grammar, so the learners will think a lot with grammar and perhaps they will lose what they want to say about. The successful achievement of using grammar depends on people's comprehension not the grammatical compositions.

Focus-on-meaning, as Krashen's (1985: 22) natural approach had

stated that language acquisition in L2, learners do not pay attention at any direct instruction on grammar, explicit error correction, or even consciousness-raising. What is needed is the comprehensible and the naturally in using language (Krashen, 1985: 2). According to this view, using grammar and having error correction is unnecessary to appear language acquisition because learners will point their focus on the form. Thus, the natural of language does not appear, and this position claims that there is no interaction between explicit and implicit knowledge. Therefore, conscious learning is different and cannot lead to language acquisition (Krashen, 1985; Larsen-Freeman, 1997).

Second, the tentative grammarians argue that grammar is needed to communicate. Though language achievement cannot be influenced by grammatical analysis, L2/LF learners cannot entirely do well without overt grammar teaching. It is the opposition of the first condition, 'anti-grammarians'. The teacher deals that to learn language with its grammar is crucial including the oppositions and contradictions in the language itself. How language teachers deal with grammar is essential on practicing the curriculum (Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001).

However, in ESL university or language centers, that issue has only recently received attention. For instance, there are studies that investigated teacher opinions about grammar teaching. It is also found that teachers in general believe that grammar is needed for students and language learning (Peacock, 1998). Some other studies looked at the relationship between teacher understanding and classroom activities and the reasons behind them. The results said that the teacher principles were often inconsistent with practices, and teacher behaviors are formed by both *personal factors* that consist of teachers' knowledge of grammar rules (Borg, 2001); and *contextual constraints* that consist of the education system, curriculum, administration, examinations, and student expectations (Farrell & Patricia, 2005; Richards, Gallo, & Renandya, 2001).

Third, 'the positive grammarians' state that in L1 situation, learners can learn more about how grammar is used and misused. Knowing more about grammar can improve our creativity of textual meaning (Carter, 2003). In L2 situation, grammar language acquisition is used in formal instruction (Ellis, 1994). However, most L2/LF learners' knowledge on grammar is important to

make the understanding, and it is hard when someone who is in very basic level wants to communicate without grammar (Gass & Madden, 1985; Widdowson, 1990).

The importance of grammar has been attention as language pedagogy in recent years though researchers have different opinions about the role of grammar teaching and learning. Larsen-Freeman (1997) point out there is a misconception and questionable thing on grammar in language teaching. The misconception assumes grammar is a group of rules about static structures in the language. The questionable statements are that the structures do not have to be taught, learners will accept them on their own understanding, or if the structures are taught, the learners can be bored with the focus-on-forms lesson that is taught (Larsen-Freeman, 1997). In other words, it is needed a new role grammar teaching in language teaching. More importantly, grammar should act as 'facilitator' (a means to an end) rather than as 'terminator' (an end) to language acquisition.

Language Awareness and Grammar Pedagogy

Language awareness is the indicator of the goal of language, and essential in teaching practice. Zhang (2014) tells the cognitive methodology, with its consciousness-raising tasks, applies to learner both L1 and L2. That is, language awareness pedagogy has been developed in grammar teaching, particularly related to consciousness-raising. Creating an appropriate approach with current thinking about how L2's acquisition in grammar learning, and with progressive views about education can be a process of discovery through problem-solving tasks (Ellis: 1992). The grammar teaching for language awareness is identified with the following features (Ellis, 1992, 1994).

Cognitive approach

It emphasizes on language acquisition and internal mental structure, usually called as language awareness. Language awareness pedagogy makes learners aware of specific features of the target language. Language awareness pedagogy is different from memory-based grammar translation methods and drill-based audio-lingual methods. Language awareness helps learners to develop a cognitive sign of the target language structures; hence, grammar is not about children's cognitive capacity, Ellis (1994). The teachers have to

understand that the learners have difference experience that will influence to the learning outcome. Through grammar, learners learn language because they can learn the functions of language and it is inter-connected with vocabulary.

Deductive and Inductive Learning

A study (Farrell & Patricia, 2005) told if there is a relation between teacher knowledge and classroom behaviors and the reasons behind them. The class behavior is needed to make language awareness. The results of these studies revealed teacher needs to do practice in the class with the students, and teacher behaviors are formed by both personal factors such as teachers' learning experience of grammar such as deductive versus inductive (Farrell & Patricia, 2005) or teachers' knowledge about (Schulz, 2001); and contextual constraints such as the education system, curriculum, administration, examinations, and student expectations (Richards, Gallo & Renandya, 2001).

Consciousness-raising, as Ellis (1992) points out, includes both deductive and inductive learning. Deductive language awareness teaching means learners improve their language awareness by doing tasks. Inductive language awareness pedagogy is to give the learner with data and then ask the learner to illustrate about the data that is provided. Ellis (2001: 1-2) students have more opportunities to pay attention to linguistic form during meaningful communication. Awareness or consciousness-raising contributes to language acquisition in three ways; learning will be faster; quantity produced will be greater; and contexts in which the rule being applied will be extended, Sharwood-Smith (1981), Swain (1985), Carter (2007).

Contribution to the Acquisition of Implicit Knowledge

Explicit knowledge contributes to acquisition of implicit knowledge directly. Therefore, grammar knowledge is needed to communicate even though it is argued that a delayed effect of consciousness-raising to the acquisition of implicit knowledge occurs in major ways, Ellis (1992: 238). The acquisition of implicit knowledge develops a communicative activity inasmuch as both of people having interaction understand each other, and they know how language is used or misused. Thus, the people are able to deliver their messages effectively.

Contribution to Inter-language Development

Language awareness teaching consists of noticing, re-noticing, and comparing, helped during acquiring language and facing the new structure of target language for learners when the learners are developmentally ready. Grammar is also needed when learners want to learn further about target language. It can be perceived beyond limited sentence-level of morph-syntactic structures to features of discourse, and socio-cultural rules of appropriateness of language-in-use. Later, language awareness to grammar provides chances to enrich learners with grammatical sensitivity in grammatical and practical level of linguistic studies. Then, van-Lier (1995) points out if someone has language awareness, it does not mean that he or she is strict on grammar book or textbook to make language awareness out, but it means that learner have to aware with our surrounding, trying to get the meaning of language and how it works, after that they practice it in daily activities.

The language learners are required to pay attention to grammar teaching. Practice is the way to make language awareness. For some people, ignoring English grammar teaching is less effective in learning. Due to the lack of correct grammar, students inside and outside the class cannot express accurate sentences, both in oral or written expressions. In a study that was held in Indonesia, some high school students still say “I think it won’t rain today”; “he is study hard”. In the English foundation stage, grammar’s weakness can affect students’ grade. It can make a failure of translation and writing that will make teachers confused. In the reading class, students cannot correctly analyze sentence structure. According to Hande-Uysal & Bardakci (2014)’s statistics, the majority of students are unsatisfied with their English performance because they have ambiguity that causes problems of reading, grammar, translation, and writing.

Methods

The fifty participants in the study were third-semester students, studying at one university in the EFL context. The participants consist of forty female and ten male. The age of the participants ranged between 19 and 20 years old, with an average age of 19.2 years old. The participants have been studying English for 7 to 9 years, with an average of 7.5 years.

The participants’ views were elicited through Repertory-Grid technique, a two-way clarification of data in which events are interlaced with abstractions

in such way as to express part of a person's system of cross-references between personal observation and experience (Tan & Hunter: 2002). Pre-and-post questionnaires were developed, and interviews were employed in the present study for data collections. The pre-questionnaire is composed of two main parts. The first part of it was to collect personal information of the participants, including name, gender, age and years of learning English. The second part of it has a particular focus on learner perceptions of grammar learning, including feelings, beliefs and attitudes. The pre-questionnaire was designed in the format of a Likert scale (strongly agree (SA) / agree (A)/ neutral (N)/ disagree (D) / strongly disagree (SD)). The participants were requested to circle their opinions (Ⓟ) after reading each statement). After the grammar teaching treatment, the post-questionnaire was administered to elicit perceptions of the participants. The post-questionnaire was also developed in the format of a strongly agree-strongly disagree Likert scale, containing fifteen statements. The participants were requested to circle their opinions (Ⓟ) after reading each statement. In addition, interviews were employed to collect retrospective data in the study. Ten voluntary participants were recruited for one individual structured interview after teaching treatments. The interviews were employed to triangulate research data collected from questionnaires on learner perceptions. The following four interview questions were used to elicit the interviewees' responses:

Q1. "Could you tell me how your grammar class is?"

Q2. "How do you learn grammar?"

Q3. "Are there any ways you use to learn grammar?"

Q4. "Which ways you feel are more effective to learn grammar?"

Findings and Discussion

The data collected from questionnaires, pre and post, were coded and analyzed. In advanced, the validity and reliability of questionnaires was analyzed by the SPSS 18.0 statistic package tool. Cronbach's Alpha of the pre-questionnaire reads as 0.94. Similarly, the post-questionnaire also displayed good reliability with the Cronbach's Alpha reading 0.978. The data of interviews and the questionnaires were transcribed and cited to support the findings. The results of the study are discussed in relation to the two research questions in

the following sections.

Research Question One:

To what extent may the participants apply different strategies for grammar learning after the treatment?

The participants’ attitudes about grammar learning before and after the treatments were compared and analyzed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Attitudes about grammar learning before and after the teaching treatment
(Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5)

Code	N	Mean	Code	N	Mean
BGL1	50	2.89	AGL1	50	1.64
BGL2	50	3.32	AGL2	50	2.46
BGL3	50	3.86	AGL3	50	2.38

As seen from Table 1 above, the participants have showed positive changes in their feelings about grammar learning after the treatment. The mean score was M =2.89 when the participants responded to the statement that to learn grammar is challenging (coded BGL1) before the teaching treatment. However, after treatments, the mean score was changed to be M= 1.64 (coded AGL1). Similarly, the mean score was M= 3.32 in the participants responding to the statement that to learn grammar is interesting (coded BGL2)”. After the treatment, in contrast, the mean score was reported to be M= 2.46 while responding to the same statement (coded AGL2). The mean score was M=3.86 while the participants responded to the statement to learn grammar is relaxing and stimulating (coded BGL3). After the treatment, the mean score of the participants responding to the same statement is M=2.38 (coded AGL3). These findings have indicated that the feelings of the participants regarding to grammar learning have changed after the treatment. As one of the interviewees (S15) said, *“I pay more attention on the grammar to understand the meaning when I was reading English books or newspapers.”*

The 94% of participants responded that they strongly agreed/agreed that learning grammar was beyond the matter of memorizing, following rules,

and focusing on forms/patterns. The majority of the participants, after the treatment, changed their beliefs in learning grammar. The participants believe that grammar facilitate their language communication in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Grammar is valued inasmuch as it enables them to speak and write English properly, Frederic (2007). Thus, the treatment appeared to have changed the participants positively. In other words, they are more willing to study grammar further.

Research Question Two:

To what extent may the participants change their perceptions of the relationship between learning grammar and language skills?

After the treatment, the participants appeared to display perceptions of the relationship between grammar and listening/speaking skill. Table 2 shows the participants perceptions of the relationship between grammar and four language skills before and after the treatment.

Table 2:
Perceptions of the relationship between grammar and language skills
before and after the teaching treatment
(Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Disagree = 4, Strongly Disagree = 5)

Code	N	Mean	Code	N	Mean
BGLS	50	3.98	AGLS	50	2.11
BGRW	50	1.81	AGRW	50	1.24

Before the teaching treatment, the mean score was M = 3.98 when the participants responded to the statement (coded BGLS) that grammar lessons could improve their listening/speaking skill. The mean score was M=1.81 when they responded to the statement (coded BGRW) that grammar lessons could improve their reading/writing skill. In contrary, the mean score was M=2.11 when the participants responded to the statement (coded AGLS) that grammar lessons can improve their listening/speaking skill after the treatment. The finding indicates that grammar teaching for language awareness could provide an interface between grammar learning and listening/speaking skills.

Meanwhile, the participants remain perceiving a close relationship between learning grammar and writing/reading skill after the treatment. The mean score was $M=1.24$ when they responded to the statement (coded AGRW) grammar lessons could improve my writing/reading after the treatment.

The participants focus on a specific item (pronunciation, intonation, prosody etc) in communication tasks; in addition to the structured meaning-based communication tasks are given. Thus, they explicitly follow instructions and notice on the specific feature in communication tasks which improve intonation and prosody (Svalberg, 2007). The language awareness theory points out that different items of language considered separate from each are in fact closely interwoven in the construction of meanings and forms, both in communication and writing (Bolitho & Carter, 2003: 256). Hence, language awareness is considered as holistic in the sense that the learning of a language is not constructed upon isolated tasks, but rather as different items related to one another.

Conclusion

The study was undertaken to investigate the affective role of teaching grammar related to language awareness within classroom contexts with a focus on learners perceptions especially attitudes and perceptions. Research findings have showed that the participants displayed their positive changes after the treatment in attitudes and perceptions towards learning grammar, and a majority of participants applied more affective-cognitive strategies to learn grammar. This study implies that language awareness due to its holistic scope encourages the participants to be more creative and innovative in their language learning. To stimulate awareness requires teachers who have knowledge of different dimensions of language awareness and what the methodological implications of such are in practice. To a greater extent, the study has also provided research evidence on the affective effectiveness of implementing language awareness pedagogy in the Indonesian EFL context. In the future, further research into language awareness pedagogy in global EFL contexts will provide insights into its potentials, applicability, and practicability in ELT.

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