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Title

Grammar Teaching Method
Preferred by Indonesian Students

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Abstract

Teaching English grammar to Indonesian students, including those whose major is English Teaching Department is a problematic thing. On one hand, they need to master English grammar well because they will use the grammar in their real communication and, for English Teaching Department students who will be the future English teachers in Indonesia, they should be able to use the grammar in their classrooms later. On the other hand, when they learn English grammar, they tend to like certain methods and dislike others. It will be the case if the students' preference on the teacher's grammar teaching methods is not found out. This research examined the preferences of 154 students about grammar instruction methods in Indonesian Higher Education context. To find out the students' preference of grammar teaching method, a mixed-method was applied. The data of the research were collected by using a mixed questionnaire. The quantitative data were analyzed by descriptive statistics and the qualitative data were analyzed by applying the interactive model of Miles and Huberman. The results of the research show that teacher's teaching grammar explicitly (deductive) followed by is preferred by 108 students (70.13%), discussion method is preferred by 38 students (24.68%), and the rest of the methods that the respondents preferred were question and answer, poetry, and group work. Interestingly, 3 students care about the way the teaching learning process is conducted. They prefer if it is conducted in a "slow but sure" way.

Keywords: *grammar teaching method, Indonesia, students' preference*

1. Introduction

The role of grammar instruction in an EFL context has been a major issue for decades. Researchers have debated whether grammar should be taught in the classroom and students have generally looked upon grammar instruction as a necessary evil at best, and an avoidable burden at worst (Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam, 2011: 71). There are some groups of language researchers related to grammar teaching, like “anti-grammarians”, “pro-grammarians”, and others. “Anti-grammarians doubt the role grammar instruction plays in language learning. This group supports “comprehensible input” by arguing that this type of input would enormously help the learner improve both their fluency and accuracy (Stern, 1983; Yim, 1998; Rodriguez and Avent, 2002). The “pro-grammarians” as the second group, claim that formal instruction plays an important role and it should not be abandoned because direct grammar instruction helps significantly with accuracy and speeds second language (L2) learning (Eisenstein-Ebsworth and Schweers, 1997). The third group agree that grammar should be taught. Yet, factors such as age, cognition and maturation of learners should be taken into consideration while teaching grammar (Celce-Murcia, 1991 & 2001).

In Indonesian context, however, the role of English grammar instruction should not be debated. Its importance is very clear. The facts show that in Indonesia, English is not a second language. English is spoken only at certain places and at certain times. Therefore, the grammar instruction in Indonesian context is unavoidable. The primary case here is that the way to teach it- whether to teach it deductively or inductively, explicitly or implicitly. Early research distinguished between two major methods: implicit (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Swain & Lopkin, 1982) and explicit grammar teaching (Ellis, 1990; Sharwood-Smith, 1981). Implicit grammar teaching was embraced in the task based approaches (Ellis, 2003; Fotos, 1998). Recently there has been some agreement that explicit instruction is also useful particularly in acquisition poor contexts (Ellis, 2006; Hinkel & Fotos, 2002; Nunan, 1998).

Teaching English grammar to Indonesian students, especially, including those whose major is English Teaching Department is a problematic thing. On one hand, they need to master English grammar well because they will use the grammar in their real communication and, for English Teaching Department students who will be the future English teachers in Indonesia, they should be able to use the grammar in their

classrooms later. On the other hand, when they learn English grammar, they tend to like certain methods and dislike the other ones. Thus, for Indonesian students, now the case is whether to teach them implicitly or explicitly. This paper reports on a study which examined Indonesian learners' preference of grammar teaching methods.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. What Is Grammar?

There are authors who define grammar differently. For Noshery and Vahdany (2014:448), grammar can be seen as a device which language users call upon when motivated by a communicative need to make their meanings clear. While according to Haussamen, (2003: xiii), the term *grammar* refers to two kinds of knowledge about language. One is subconscious knowledge i.e. the language ability that children develop at an early age without being taught. The other kind of knowledge is the conscious understanding of sentences and texts that can help students improve their reading and writing abilities by building on that subconscious knowledge. The conscious understanding includes knowing the parts of sentences and how they work together, knowing how sentences connect with one another to build meaning, and understanding how and why we use language in different ways in different social situations.

Larsen-Freeman (2001) has referred to the three dimensions present in the definition of grammar: form, meaning, and use. Moreover, Larsen-Freeman (2009: 521) states “grammar is a system of meaningful structures and patterns that are governed by particular pragmatic constraints”. A grammatical class (a label assigned to) is a set of substitution lists (of grammatical elements appearing in different contexts) that have identical or broadly similar members. The generality of the phrase ‘grammatical element’ means that we apply it to classes of morphemes, words, phrases, clauses (and even sentences), regardless of the size of the element: thus the class of deverbal noun-forming suffixes, the class of prepositions, the class of noun phrases, etc. (Jackson, 2003: 141).

2.2. Grammar Teaching and Its Goal

Larsen-Freeman (1991) points out “teaching grammar means enabling language students to use linguistic forms accurately, meaningfully and appropriately. Swan (2002) emphasizes that grammar should be taught (not too much) in order to help students with

comprehensibility and accuracy. Morelli (2003:33-34) has observed, “Grammar can be taught traditionally or contextually, but students perception should be considered by teachers in the decision-making process”. Grammar teaching can involve a combination of practice and consciousness raising. It is perfectly possible to teach grammar in the sense of helping learners to understand and explain grammatical phenomena without having them engage in activities that require repeated production of the structure concerned (Rod Ellis, 2002: 170). Grammar teaching can be helpful if the teacher teaches students how to use grammar in life discourse and avoid the traditional perspective of grammar rule teaching (Khan, 2007 p. 2). For Shafer (2012: 20), “Instead of teaching grammar, usage, and as a prescriptive way to reach a uniformity we should approach it descriptively, exploring and celebrating the many discourses that students bring to class”.

Haussamen, (2003) mentions three goals of grammar teaching: the ability to communicate comfortably and effectively in both spoken and written Standard English, with awareness of when use of Standard English is appropriate, the ability to analyze the grammatical structure of sentences within English texts, using grammatical terminology correctly and demonstrating knowledge of how sentence-level grammatical structure contributes to the coherence of paragraphs and texts, and an understanding of, and appreciation for, the natural variation that occurs in language across time, social situation, and social group.

2.3. Methods of Teaching Grammar

A large number of methods and techniques emerged over the years as a response to the ongoing discussion of grammar pedagogy. Some authors use the terms ‘method’ and ‘approach’ as equivalent terms, while others (Harmer, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2001) distinguish them. According to Harmer (2001, p. 78) an ‘approach’ includes the description of the nature of language and the nature of language learning. However, the term method is an umbrella term for specifications and interrelations of theory while ‘practice’ or ‘technique’ is the practical realization of an approach (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 16). I myself prefer to use the term method in this paper, i.e. the general direction in grammar teaching which can be implemented using a series of techniques and specific procedures.

Nassaji and Fotos (2011: i) divide the journey of grammar teaching into three phases, from a phase “in which grammar instruction was central, to one in which grammar instruction was absent, and to the recent reconsideration of the significance of the role of grammar instruction”. The journey can be seen from various teaching methods that have emerged: Grammar-translation Method (nineteenth–midtwentieth centuries), Direct Method (first part of twentieth century), Audiolingual Method (ALM) (1950s–1970s), Cognitive Approach (1970s), Natural Approach (1980s), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), (1970s–today) Richards and Rodgers (2001).

Categorizations and classifications of grammar methods and terminology have been found in literature. The first distinction which has been prevalent throughout the literature is deductive vs. inductive grammar instruction. The aim of inductive instruction is to acquire rules implicitly without students being aware of the target form (DeKeyser, 1994). While Patel and Jain (2008: 143-144) mention three methods of teaching of grammar: (1) Deductive Method, (2) Inductive method, and (3) Inductive and Deductive Method. In deductive method the teacher uses a grammar text book. He or she tells his or her students rules or definitions and explains those with the help of examples then gives exercise and asks his or her students to apply the rules. In inductive method, the teacher first presents or takes the example from the students then comes on theory or concept. The third method (inductive and deductive method as the name shows, is the synthesis of both above the methods) can remove the limitation of both the above methods. The teacher following this method will first present the examples before his or her students then will explain them or analyses them. Then he or she will try to see that students draw some conclusion and then teacher will give the rules. The teacher will continue by giving new examples and asking his or her students to verify the rules. Furthermore, Early research distinguished between two major methods: implicit (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Swain & Lopkin, 1982) and explicit grammar teaching (Ellis, 1990; Sharwood-Smith, 1981). Implicit grammar teaching was embraced in the task based approaches (Ellis, 2003; Fotos, 1998). However, recently there has been some agreement that explicit instruction is also useful particularly in acquisition poor contexts (Ellis, 2006; Hinkel & Fotos, 2002; Nunan, 1998).

Another distinction is focus on form vs. focus on meaning. The former indicates a situation when one grammar component is presented explicitly followed by extensive practice while the latter, is a term that designates attention to linguistic items in communicative activities with emphasis on meaning (Ellis, 2001b, 2006). Focus on Form includes a range of techniques which aim to focus students' attention to the form implicitly and explicitly. Focus on form is often discussed as grammar in integration in pedagogical circles (Borg & Burns, 2008). This involves grammar being embedded in meaning oriented activities and tasks and familiarizing students with the communicative purposes of grammar which give immediate opportunities for practice and use (Mitchell, 2000). A series of approaches has been introduced which offer different techniques of grammar integration into language learning: lexical approaches, the use of corpus concordancing, task based approaches and functional systemic approaches (Borg & Burns, 2008; Ellis, 2006, 2008). Hişmanoğlu (2005) considers "literature as a popular technique for teaching both basic language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking) and language areas (i.e. vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation)"

3. Research Method and Procedures

3.1. Research Subjects

The research applied qualitative and quantitative paradigm. The goal of the study was to identify the methods of grammar teaching preferred by the subjects from the subjects' view –point and then to find out the percentage of their preference.

The subjects of the research were selected purposefully based on the research need: those who were formally engaged in the process of teaching and learning English grammar. As a result, the second and the fourth semester students of State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN) Batusangkar whose major is English were selected and 154 students became the Informants of the research. To determine the sample of the research, there were several guidelines that were used: the purpose of the study, the focus of the study, the primary data collection strategy, the availability of the informants, and the redundancy of the information as McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 404) suggest.

3.2. Data Collection

To collect the data of the research, a questionnaire was distributed (Gay, Mills, and Airasian, 2009: 381). The questionnaire consisting of closed-and open-response

items was used because they are complementary. According to Heigham and Croker (2009: 201-2), closed- response items only require respondents to select their answer(s) from a limited list or selection in which questions and responses for this type of item use categories that have been defined by the researcher beforehand. Open-response items call for the respondents to answer in their own words.

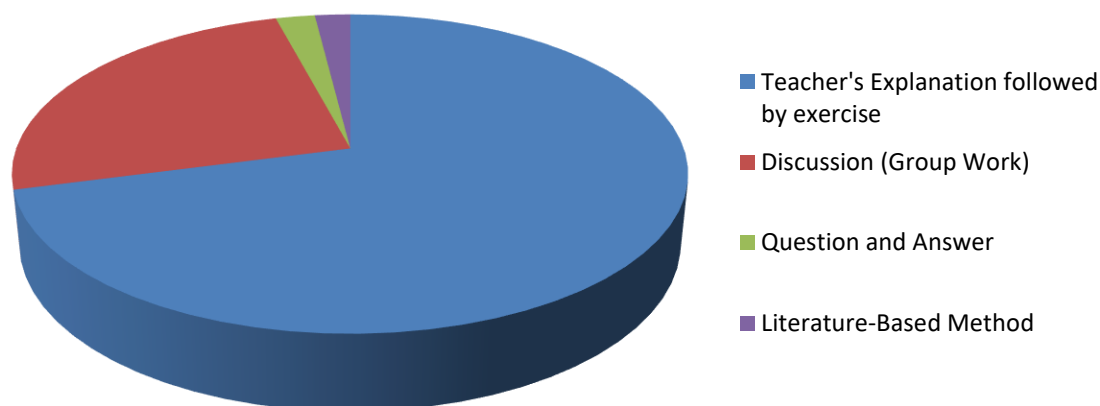
3.3. Data Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data, the technique of data analysis as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used. The technique of data analysis includes three phases, namely data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification. McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 462) state “qualitative analysis is a relatively systematic process of selecting, categorizing, comparing, synthesizing, and interpreting to provide explanations of the single phenomenon of interest.” Moreover, they point out that qualitative data analyses vary widely since there are differences in foci, purposes, data collection strategies, and modes of qualitative inquiries. To analyze quantitative data, descriptive statistics was used in which the percentage of each method was counted.

4. Results and Discussion

Before the students’ preference of grammar teaching method was asked, their opinion about the importance of grammar in learning English was asked. All of the respondents (100%) agreed that English grammar was very important in learning English. Then, they were also questioned whether they wanted to improve their English grammar mastery or not. All of them (100%) stated that they wanted to improve their English grammar master. The two previous questions were asked by using closed-ended question using Likert-scale. Meanwhile to collect the data of students’ preference of grammar teaching method, an open-ended question was asked. The results of the research show that there are some grammar teaching methods preferred by the students. They are: teacher’s teaching grammar explicitly (deductive) followed by examples and exercises is preferred by 108 students (70.13%), discussion/group work method is preferred by 43 students (25,76%), and the rest of the methods that the respondents preferred were question and answer (10 respondents or 2.16%), and literature-based method (poetry, song, and drama) by 9 respondents (1.95%).

Students' Grammar Teaching Method Preference



Besides describing about their preference of grammar teaching method, three students mention that they prefer when the teacher teaches grammar in a “slow but sure way”, three students prefer to use their own experiences in learning, and two of them mention about item analysis.

Based on the research results, it can be inferred that a deductive method is preferred by most of the students, not an inductive one. According to Nazari and Allahyar (2012), a deductive approach (I prefer to use the term “method) to language teaching underlines explaining the grammar item to learners and then training them in applying it, whereas an inductive approach fosters practicing the syntactic structure in context and then asking learners to infer the grammar rule from practical examples. It means that most of the subjects prefer. While the former is said to be more teacher-centered, the latter is considered to be more learner-centered.

The research results show that the students prefer to be taught using a prescriptive way even though Shafer (2012) points out “instead of teaching grammar, usage, and language as a prescriptive way to reach a of a uniformity of correctness, we should approach it descriptively, exploring and celebrating the many discourses that students bring to class. The subjects prefer to be passive even though they are expected to be no longer passive recipients of what Freire (1989) called the banking system of education but actually become collaborators in the learning and sharing that is both

social and forever. Pettersen (2006) explains that the goal of grammar instruction is to "shift the from good-versus-bad to curiosity" (p. 388). Indeed, what Pettersen contends is that grammar instruction can be both interesting and helpful when it is a real life context-when it is taken out of the prescriptive world of right and wrong and discussed for its social appropriateness.

Metalinguistic discussion (i.e., the use of grammatical terminology to talk about language) is seen by Stern (1992:327) as one of the characteristics of explicit grammar teaching. Burgess and Etherington (2002:440-441) also conclude that teachers believe that explicit teaching of grammar is favoured by their students because of expectations and feelings of insecurity. Students expectations of traditional, explicit grammar teaching have been confirmed by many teachers (cf. Borg, 1999a, b). While students favour formal and explicit grammar instruction and error correction, teachers favour communicative activities with less conscious focus on grammar (e.g., Brindley 1984; Kumaravadivelu 1991; Leki 1995; Schultz 1996, 2001; Spratt 1999). However, As Morelli (2003:33-34) has observed, "Grammar can be taught traditionally or contextually, but student perception should be considered by teachers in the decision-making process. Students need to feel confident that educators have met their needs . . . and educators should be willing to consider the attitudes and perceptions of students when making decisions about how to teach grammar."

Even though the students prefer deductive grammar teaching method, it does not mean that the English teachers need only to explain the rules but they need also to make them meaningful and applicable for the learners. In classes that are designated for teaching grammar, grammar is taught explicitly either by presenting the rules and then giving examples, which is referred to as deductive reasoning, or by providing examples and then students arrive to the rule, which is referred to as inductive reasoning (Thornbury, 2000). Then, some communicative based tasks might be used to practice the rules (Andrews, 2007).

One of the examples proposed in the literature for explicit grammar teaching is the use of *consciousness-raising* (CR) grammar tasks (Ellis, 1995; Fotos, 1993). Ellis (1997) defines a CR task as "a pedagogic activity where the learners are provided with L2 data in some form and required to perform some operation on or with it" (p. 160). He added that the purpose of a CR task "is to arrive at an explicit understanding of some

linguistic property or properties of the TL” (p. 160). Thornbury (2000) asserted that the pro-grammar teaching researchers claim that through CR “learning seems to be enhanced when the learners’ attention is directed to getting the forms right, and when the learner’s attention is directed to features of the grammatical system” (p. 24). For example, in a research performed by Fotos (1994) with EFL Japanese college students to examine the effectiveness of CR grammar tasks, she found that having the students work together to analyze and discover the rules was effective in generating accurate understanding of the grammatical structures and in using the target language.

5. Conclusion

This research can have significant implications not only for Indonesian students, but also other EFL students learning English grammar. The investigation into the students’ preference on grammar teaching methods can be an enlightening tool for English teachers, in making decision on what methods to use to teach English grammar to their students. The study has showed that Indonesian preferred deductive grammar teaching methods. Students are concerned with the the methods of grammar teaching the teachers use what they learn more than. Hence, EFL teachers need to highlight the importance of grammar lessons to students by organizing their grammar lessons in such a way that students understand the usefulness of learning a particular grammatical component. The students need to be provided with the opportunity to apply what they learn in real life contexts to make them. The study also endorsed the significant role of the teachers in the decision making process and in curriculum design. Teachers need to actively engage in understanding student needs and adapt materials and teaching methods accordingly. The findings have important implications for English teachers that they need to master a variety of methods or techniques that will make the students both understand and are able to use the English grammar in the four language skills in real life situation.

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