

MAKING SENSE OF GRAMMAR IN ENGLISH THROUGH PRACTICING THE DIALOGUES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to reveal the way of the English Department students at the University of Lambung Mangkurat in making sense of grammar in English that they have learnt for about six years or more. It is a matter of fact that those students have learnt English grammar mostly for more than five years. However they still cannot feel the sense of grammar while using it. Therefore, they often seem confused which part of grammar to be used between one occasion to another. By practicing the dialogues, those students can sharpen their senses of grammar of English.

Keywords: *making sense, grammar in English, practicing the dialogues*

BACKGROUND

The human beings worldwide starting from their first existence in the world, they need languages as a means of communication. In pre-historical era, people used the gestures or the simple languages which were understood by their communities. In this modern era, there are a thousand languages around the globe, such as English, French, Russian, Arabic, and so on. Those languages are used by the citizens of the countries, for instance French is used by French or the countries occupied by French or people who are interested in leaning French. Moreover, English nowadays is becoming the universal language because almost all of the people in all parts of the world use it for communication. It is clear that the human beings “cannot live without a language” (Crystal, 2003). By using the language, someone or some people can express whatever he or she has or they have in mind so that the others understand well, and they can exchange the turns well.

Indonesian who are civilized also need a language as a means of communication. Indonesian should acquire at least three languages in their life that are the mother tongue (e.g. Banjarese because I am from Banjar tribe) depending on the society where they live, Bahasa Indonesia as the national language, and English as the first foreign language in Indonesia. However, we will discuss about the specific thing by only focusing on grammar of English in this paper.

Grammar is the fundamental organizing principle of language (Crystal, 2003). In other words, grammar becomes the backbone of a language. By having the good grammar, the flow of sentences can be smoother and the meaning will be more understandable. All languages exist in the world have their uniqueness in grammar, including English. Grammar of English consists of sixteen kinds of Tenses with the different patterns, articles, sentence connectors, and so forth.

These aspects of grammar of English have been learnt by those Indonesian, including the students at the University of Lambung Mangkurat in Banjarmasin for about six years or more. It has been started when they were at the junior high schools or even at the elementary schools until they are at the university.

Even though the students at the University of Lambung Mangkurat in Banjarmasin have studied English for about six years or more, they still have some difficulties in feeling the sense of grammar of English in their context. They often look confused about what parts of English grammar they should use in one occasion, especially in Speaking skills. There is a possibility that some of them know about the patterns of English. However, when they are asked to produce the sentences in English correctly, they may fail. It means that knowing the formula of English grammar cannot show the guarantee that the students can apply them well, especially in productive skills. While some others might be good in writing sentences in English but when they are asked to utter those sentences, they cannot do that well. Some of the words might be missing or they may make some other mistakes.

THE PHENOMENON OF THE USE OF ENGLISH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LAMBUNG MANGKURAT

In average, the students at the University of Lambung Mangkurat in Banjarmasin have learnt English for about six years or more. Basically, the students study the grammar of English separately from the English skills such as Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing skills, starting from elementary schools or junior high schools until university. At the English Department at the University of Lambung Mangkurat in Banjarmasin, grammar of English is taught in four levels as one series compulsory subjects, that are Structures I, Structures II, Structures III, and Structures IV. Those series is started from Structures I given at the second semester, and continued by the others on the following semesters. As the compulsory subjects, they must be able to pass every single Structures series in every semester. The materials given are ranging gradually from the easiest one until the most difficult one, arranged by the team of the Structures lecturers. By doing this, the possibility of overlapping materials between one series to another can be minimized. Usually, the team will produce the students' books to be used for a semester. For instance, the team will release the students' books for Structures I and Structures III for the even semester, and they will produce the students' books for Structures II and Structures IV for the odd semester. The materials are

arranged based on the syllabi at the English Department at the University of Lambung Mangkurat. There will be some changes in terms of the kinds of activities and content every semester in those books, but the topics will remain the same. This is done for avoiding the laziness of the students in studying Structures because they are usually inherited the students' books by their seniors. However, in the reality, the existence of the students' books cannot motivate the students more in studying grammar of English. It is very often to find the books are very clean without any scratches at all. When those students are asked whether they studied the grammar of English at home or not, mostly they will say that they did not study grammar at all. If we gave the further question why they did it. The response will be because they got bored studying grammar continuously for six years or more by using books. They need something which is interesting in order to learn the grammar of English. When, we check their ability in using their knowledge related to the implementation of grammar of English, they often fail in doing it. They seem very confused anytime they are asked to implement the knowledge by saying some sentences in English, as part of their exercises. The mistakes will happen here and there, meaning that they cannot feel the "sense" of grammar of English while applying their prior knowledge of grammar, although they have learnt English grammar for about six years or more.

MAKING SENSE OF THE GRAMMAR OF ENGLISH

Making sense of the grammar of English is difficult, but it is possible to do. The possibility of making sense of the grammar of English will happen when the students practice making sense of it regularly. It could be done one hour everyday, for instance. Our feelings towards something can be trained well as long as we have the strong believe and effort, without losing any hopes for being success in this matter.

One of the best ways in order to train making sense of the grammar of English is through "Speaking" (Szyalski, undated and Crystal, 2003). Through speaking or saying that grammatical sentences, besides improving [the use of] grammar in a natural way, the students also can train their feeling towards a certain grammatical sentences. It happens because their "awareness" of a certain sentences will be increased, which is in line with Crystal (2003). For example when the students are practicing the dialogues that they have just made in pairs which is talking about their habitual action every day, they can notice that they will use Simple Present Tense. However, knowing (in a short moment) like that will not be enough to stimulate their memory that if they found the sentences showing about the habitual actions they had to use Simple Present Tense. Without using their feelings to make sense of those kinds of sentences in context, they may forget that they must use Simple Present Tense. There are some possibilities that they will use the other Tenses like Present Continuous Tense, Present Future, Past Tense, or Present Perfect Tense.

WAY TO CONDUCT THE ACTIVITY IN MAKING SENSE OF THE GRAMMAR OF ENGLISH

“Grammar and speaking [e.g. dialogues] are inseparable” (Sams, 2003:64) or in other words they are “integrated” (Kyriacou, 1991, Chin, 2000, and Hinkel, 2006). Talking without applying a good grammar will be like building a house without any skeleton. It will be very difficult for the others to understand what we exactly mean while speaking. However, this integration can work well only to the “high level” (Swan, 2006) of students because the learners are the university students who have learnt English for at least six years. In this stage, those students have already known some basic rules of grammar of English. They just need to sharpen their knowledge by implementing them well.

In the beginning of the lesson, the lecturer shows the model of the dialogue by using one of the tenses, for example Past Tense. The dialogue model is between two people who are talking about their activities which happened in the past. The materials can be recorded in the cassette, or CD, or DVD. In addition, the lecturer should tell the students about the procedure of conducting this activity by telling them that the recording will be played for three times. The first chance as “the hook” (Ellis, 2005 and Lightbown, 1991) is for allowing the students to listen to the sentences using Past Tense. The students must pay attention to the recording attentively. The second chance is for allowing the students to write the sentences which use Past Tense. And the third chance is for allowing the students to check the sentences that they got through listening to the recording.

Script:

Lina : “Hi Diana, how are you?”

Diana : “Hi, Lina. I am fine. What about you?”

Lina : “I am O.K. too.”

Diana : “Anyway, I went to the Floating Market last Sunday. What about you? Where did you go last Sunday?”

Lina : “I didn’t go anywhere. I stayed at home helping my mother making some cookies.”

Diana : “Wow, that was a nice activity to do, Lina. How lucky you are!”

Lina : “Thank you. Anyway, what did you find in the Floating Market?”

Diana : “I found some food sellers, fruit sellers, and vegetables sellers there. All of them used the small boat named *klotok*. I also met some costumers bargained the food there. It was amazing!”

Lina : “With whom did you go there?”

Diana : “I went there with my parents. Visiting some interesting places are our habits when we have a holiday.”

“Lina, have you ever gone to the Floating Market or the other interesting places?”

Lina : “Not yet. Usually, I spend my holiday at home. I didn’t have anyone to go with”

Diana : "I see. Probably, next Sunday you can join us visiting Haratai Waterfall in Loksado, if you want."
Lina : "Wonderful! Thank you. I will be happy visiting that place."
Diana : "You are very welcome. So, be ready then."
Lina : "O.K."
Diana : "See you then."
Lina : "See you."

The activity above is done to activate the students' schemata about the sentences in Past Tense. Their identification of the sentences which use Past Tense will give the lecturer a picture about how far the students knowledge of Past Tense. There will be some possibilities that the students make some mistakes in the form of identifying the sentences, writing the complete sentences, and so on. However, it is understandable because those students have learnt grammar of English only by using the text-books. They have never used their feelings in order to feel the sense of learning grammar of English. The next thing to do is the lecturer and the students discuss about the sentences that the students have got, whether the sentences are correct or not.

The correct sentences by using Past Tense are:

1. Anyway, I went to the Floating Market last Sunday.
2. Where did you go last Sunday?
3. I didn't go anywhere.
4. I stayed at home helping my mother making some cookies.
5. Wow, that was a nice activity to do, Lina.
6. Anyway, what did you find in the Floating Market?
7. I found some food sellers, fruit sellers, and vegetables sellers there.
8. All of them used the small boat named *klotok*.
9. I also met some costumers bargained the food there. It was amazing!
10. With whom did you go there?
11. I went there with my parents.

Then, the students will be asked to work in pairs in making their own dialogues concerning on the use of sentences with Past Tense. The students are allowed to choose one of the vast contexts as long as the scope of the topics is about the past events. They might talk about their activities done last Sunday, their past experiences in visiting the zoo, and so forth. Those students can do this activity for about ten minutes. The lecturer can go around in order to make sure that everything runs well. If the students need some helps from the lecturer, the lecturer can assist them and make sure they are on the right track. After having the script, the students can rehearse their dialogues for about five minutes, before performing it in front of the class. Rehearsing the dialogue here means that the students should also think about the atmosphere of the dialogue that they have created in their script. They should know in what context their dialogues are. When they are rehearsing, they will know if they make some mistakes. They will

activate their self-monitor in order to make their rehearsal better. They can feel those mistakes and revise their mistakes by themselves. It means that they learn the grammar of English “consciously” (Krashen, 1993 and Patterson, 1999) which can give a great benefit in sensing it. Having to do so, they will be able to learn the sentences in Past Tense by activating their feelings to feel the sense of the grammar of English well. This activity is done in turns, meaning that they do a “role-play” (Richards, 2003:14) focusing on the accuracy of the sentences in the form of Past Tense, as the example. Using the role-play as “a task based” (Ellis, 2002) will allow the students to have the opportunity to feel the sense of using the grammar of English.

BENEFITS IN BEING ACCURATE

One of the benefits of being accurate that a student gets is the lecturer or the others to whom he or she speaks with will be easily understand his or his speaking. Therefore, the communication in one way or in two ways will run well naturally. The others can reply the turns well too.

The other benefit of being accurate is the students will be trained well in using the accurate grammar of English. When, talking accurately is becoming the habit, they will be easier to get good jobs someday later. Swan (2006) states “being able to speak accurately will be prioritized in obtaining job.” It is true because people need someone or some people who can communicate well in English, accurately and fluently. Accuracy becomes the priority because it will shows that someone is intelligent because that person is able to apply his or her knowledge of English well. For example, when a company want to attract the investors from England, the company need someone who is able to speak English accurately and fluently to persuade them to invest some assets at the company. If the person in charged can communicate well with the investors, the agreement can be done easily. Otherwise, the company will suffer a financial loss.

PROBLEMS IN CONDUCTING THE ACTIVITY IN MAKING SENSE OF THE GRAMMAR OF ENGLISH

There are some problems which might happen while conducting the activity, integrating the grammar of English with Speaking, in the form of making sense of grammar by practicing the dialogues.

The first problem is the imbalanced knowledge of students in terms of the grammar of English. Some of the students have good basic of grammar of English while the others do not have good basic grammar of English. When they are asked to implement those knowledge in making a script to be rehearsed before presented in front of the class, they might have some difficulties.

The second problem is the imbalanced abilities in integrating the grammar of English into dialogues. Some of the students may have good instinct in making sense of the grammar of English while practicing the dialogue while the others may not have it. Those students who can feel the sense of grammar of English can really get into the real atmosphere created in the script as if it is natural and real.

The third problem is this activity might be tiring for both lecturer and students. This can happen if the class is a large class, with more than 26 students in one class. If the number of students in a class is less than 30 students, it will be fine for both sides because it will be easier to handle the progress of students. In addition, giving the intensive lessons can be done easily.

SOLUTIONS TO OVERCOME THE PROBLEMS IN MAKING SENSE OF THE GRAMMAR OF ENGLISH

Any problems will have the solutions. There are three solutions in overcoming the problems above.

First is about the imbalanced knowledge of students in terms of the grammar of English. The imbalanced knowledge of the grammar of English might happen because the students at the English Department at the University of Lambung Mangkurat come from the different senior high schools, scattered in Kalimantan Selatan province. Some of the students are from senior high schools in Java or Sumatera. Consequently, their level of knowledge are varied. However, this matter can be solved by exposing them with some grammar text-books, giving them some tasks like asking them to watch the films and making some notes about the kinds of tenses used in the films, and so on. Watching the films might be more interesting for the students because it is entertaining, compared with exposing them with the text-books.

Second is about the imbalanced abilities in integrating the grammar of English into dialogues. Talking about the abilities will always close to the practice. The more the students practice their abilities, the more sensible their instinct will be. As long as the students have the strong willingness and keep practicing to train themselves in sharpening their abilities, someday their abilities will be balanced closely.

Third is about this activity might be tiring for both lecturer and students. As it has been mentioned above that if the class only consists of 20 to 26 students, the class will be ideal. The lecturer can help the students to be able to maximize the lesson in training the students to make sense of the grammar of English through dialogues intensively.

CONCLUSION

Making sense of the grammar of English is difficult to do, especially for the ones who have never done it before. However, making sense of the grammar of English can be done as long as the students have the strong willingness and keep practicing the dialogues in making sense of it. The great benefit of being able to make sense of it is the students will not be confused anymore about the kinds of Tenses to be used because they know the atmosphere, the context and the kinds of words used in their script while practicing and rehearsing the dialogues with their partners. Learning the grammar of English “consciously” like this will be interesting and stay in their long term memory well, because they learn the rules, apply the rules, mention the words and feel the words and the sentences at once.

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