

Combining Form and Function in Language Teaching: Teaching Grammar Communicatively

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Abstrak: perdebatan mengenai metode terbaik untuk diterapkan dalam pembelajaran bahasa, terutama di dalam konteks bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa kedua dan bahasa asing, telah berlangsung selama sekitar empat puluh tahun. Kelompok pertama adalah pendukung metode pengajaran bahasa yang berfokus pada bentuk, sedangkan kelompok kedua adalah mereka yang mendukung metode yang berfokus pada fungsi. Dalam praktik pembelajaran, metode yang berfokus pada bentuk (*form-focused*) memandang pembelajaran gramatika dan semua aturannya sebagai syarat mutlak, sedangkan metode yang berfokus pada fungsi (*function-focused*) percaya bahwa pemerolehan keterampilan komunikatif yang baik dalam bahasa target adalah tujuan akhir dalam pembelajaran bahasa kedua. Kedua belah pihak mengklaim bahwa metode yang mereka gunakan dalam praktik pembelajaran sebagai cara terbaik untuk membuat peserta didik memperoleh bahasa target dengan baik. Terlepas dari keuntungan yang ditawarkan oleh masing-masing metode, beberapa peneliti menemukan bahwa setiap metode sebenarnya tidak bebas dari kelemahan. Dengan menyadari kelemahan dari setiap metode, tampaknya rasional untuk tidak berdiri di satu metode saja dalam praktik pembelajaran bahasa. Mungkin dengan menggabungkan dua metode dalam praktik pembelajaran, guru bahasa akan mendapatkan keuntungan dan menghilangkan kelemahan yang dimiliki oleh masing-masing metode. Sebuah metode baru dapat dibentuk dengan menerapkan pembelajaran formal dalam kegiatan komunikatif.

Kata kunci: pembelajaran bahasa, metode berfokus pada bentuk, metode berfokus pada fungsi

INTRODUCTION

The form-focused and the function-focused language teaching method have been known and used by many teachers of ESL and EFL all around the globe. The

teachers used to believe in each method's advantages to make their students competence and successful in their learning. In Indonesia, for example, teachers in schools and courses use one of the methods in their teaching because they believe that the method is applicable for their students' contexts. However, those teachers also realise that each method has weaknesses in the practice. For instance, the form-focused method fails to make learners fluent in using the target language while the function-focused method fails in promoting learners' accuracy. Other methods such as the grammar translation and the communicative language learning are also known and practiced by these teachers in different occasion but still with unsatisfactorily result. One solution worth to be tried to solve this problem perhaps by using a combination method between form-focused that is able to improve learners' accuracy in using the target language with function-focused method which is believed to be able to make learners fluent.

Before coming to the discussion about the combined method, it is better to have a review about the Grammar Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching as two teaching methods that represent the form-focused and the function-focused methods.

DISCUSSIONS

Grammar Translation Method

Before the introducing of functional English teaching during the 1980s, English teachers and practitioners in many Asian countries including Indonesia had viewed focus on form in language teaching as essential method for achieving learners' proficiencies. This kind of teaching practice was usually applied in grammatical/grammar lesson. Chung (2005) stated that structural curriculum and grammar translation method were very familiar for most teachers in Malaysia and Taiwan during this decade. Indonesia as part of this region also experienced similar condition. Even in Indonesia, this grammar translation method had been induced in elementary and secondary English language learning for about eight years of study time and continued to tertiary level for another one semester study for all non English major disciplines.

The focus of the teaching in the grammar translation method was grammatical rules which were taught through writing form or written exercises. Vocabulary was learnt through translated list and comprehension texts. Written text was regarded as the real language which was superior to the spoken version in this method. The most important thing in language acquisition according to this

method was the accuracy in composition of writing while speaking and listening which were mainly presented in conversation activities gained very less attention.

The application of this method in teaching practice was supported by many language experts who revealed the advantages given to teaching practice. Ellis (1989; cited in Noh, 2005) suggested that if grammar was taught intensively for a certain range of time, learners knowledge would be promoted as well as their accuracy in using difficult structure of the target language.

The critics

In the development, this method had triggered many critics from experts, especially those with function-focused interest. Krashen (1981) and Prabhu (1987) claimed that the formal instruction was not beneficial for SLA because learners acquired their second language through a subconscious process. These experts mentioned that formal grammar lessons would develop only 'declarative' knowledge of grammar structures, not the 'procedural; ability to use forms correctly which was usually needed in real communication. They also claimed that the form-focused teaching method failed to promote learners' fluency of the target language.

Similar opinions were given by Bailey, Madden, and Krashen (1974) and Dulay and Burt (1974) from their early studies on acquisition of English Morphology. The studies found that speakers of different first languages learn morphemes in a similar order without formal instruction and this order was claimed to be applicable for second language learning as well. This claim was also supported by Schwartz (1993) who stated that "only positive data can affect the construction of an interlanguage grammar that is comparable to the knowledge system that characterizes the result of first language acquisition" (p.147). Again, this concept was also regarded applicable for second language acquisition. Cook (1991) even claimed that formal instruction was unnecessary for second language learning, while Noah (2005) added that forms should not be taught in formal teaching because learners would acquire the forms from normal exposure.

The condition appeared in Indonesia and other countries such as China and Japan also contributed in giving the critics to the form-focused method. It was the fact in Indonesia that although learners had been exposed by almost nine years of English learning, most of them were still failed to perform good communication competenc.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The findings of experts such as Krashen (1981), Prabhu (1987), and Schwartz (1993) had made a radical change in ESL and EFL teaching practice from form-focused to function-focused language teaching. One of the result was the

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which stresses on meaning (Sysoyev, 1999). This change had caused the abandoning of grammar teaching in ESL/EFL context. As in Indonesia, CLT was then claimed as the best method for teaching second or foreign language and many efforts had been poured by language practitioners and government since the late 1980s by implementing CLT in educational curriculum for all level of education (Musthafa, 2001).

CLT which was regarded as an approach rather than a method of language teaching (Brown, 2000). It focused on language use instead of language forms. This approach put macroskills like listening, speaking, reading and writing into practice. The availability of meaningful topics was important in order to enable learners to communicate in meaningful ways and develop their communicative competences. There were five fundamental characteristics of this approach; focusing on learning to communicate in L2, using authentic materials in teaching and learning process, balancing the focus on language forms and the learning process itself as well, developing learners prior experience in teaching and learning process, and relating the classroom language learning with the real world (Nunan, 1999). Classroom objective in this approach was emphasized on communicative purpose rather than language rules. This was of course a rather radical change from the superiority of written tasks and activities in form-focused grammar teaching into communicative activities which are mainly dominated by speaking.

The Mix Method

However, the emergence of this new trend does not automatically satisfy many English teachers and practitioners since they argue that it will be rather impossible to have a good skill in communicating with English without understanding good knowledge about the form of the language. The learners might be good in many communicative activities, but they could be weak in formative tasks such as in the tests of English proficiencies for foreign or other languages like TOEIC and TOEFL which are dominated by grammar matters and structures. Other experts from out of the two sides also think about the best solution which perhaps could provide the balance between the form and accuracy in one side, and the function and fluency in the other side. The best solution for bridging the gap between the government demand on functional method and the teachers request on the important of formal method for their learners was also demanded in Indonesia (Musthafa, 2001). The answer could be a combination of those two main methods into a new desirable and applicable method for English teaching; *the communicative grammar teaching*.

Communicative Grammar Teaching

The idea about communicative grammar teaching can be traced back to the emergence of functional grammar introduced by experts like Halliday in 1960s. The idea in functional grammar is that grammar should be explained based on the sentence structure to make it able to construct different kinds of meaning. Christie (2010) describes that functional grammar should be used to construct sentences in their context of use which focuses on real language. Therefore, functional grammar is the best way since it has interrelated senses in form of functional view on the nature of language, functional relation to grammar, and practicable to language analysis and language use. Nichols (1986) describes functional grammar as a tool to analyze grammatical structure and the entire communicative situation such as the purposes of the speech event, its participants, and its discourse context at the same time. With all of this ability, functional grammar can provide a strong connection between form and meaning which is essential in teaching second language (Halliday, 1994).

Recently, the functional grammar idea is translated into a new concept of integrating teaching grammar into CLT which stress on the balance between accuracy and fluency in teaching English. This concept regards grammar as an important part in gaining good communicative competence (Sysoyev, 1999; and Chung, 2005). This concept is then known as communicative grammar.

The communicative grammar concept presents the four macroskills as one integrated element in teaching practice. Grammar is practiced both orally and written at the utterance and discourse level (Sysoyev, 1999). With this practice, learners' communicative grammatical competence, in which the learners are able to understand and use language forms in real context spontaneously, can be achieved. It means that learners can apply their knowledge of language rules in their real communication. Ur (2003) proposes that the integration of teaching grammar and communicative language teaching must be facilitated well by providing five conditions in teaching practices namely; 1). explicit grammar syllabus, 2) proactive and reactive teaching, 3) short explanation in the classroom, 4) availability of meaningful and communicative exercises, and 5) continuous reminding for drawing learners' attention and error correction.

Communicative grammar method makes language learning purpose for gaining fluency and accuracy becomes reasonable. Here, the teachers in language learning are still the important figure to make the purpose achievable. According to Richards (2006), the teachers have an authority to decide which ability to be taught to learners at the first stage. If the teachers thinks that the learners' fluency activities run well then they could assign the learners to continue with language rules or vice versa. On the other hand, the teachers can also start with

exposing the learners to language rules, with their guidance, before assigning them to produce language based on the rules related to real world practice. One of most important things in the activities is the teacher should make the classroom activities correlate with the learners' real world context.

Two models of activities dealing with the communicative grammar teaching as the example of integrating grammar teaching with communicative teaching are *EEE method* developed by Sysoyev (1999) and *Natural Context method* proposed by Chung (2005). Both models have been continually adapting by English teachers, including the writer, in Padang State Polytechnics, West Sumatra, Indonesia, for teaching English for Special Purposes.

EEE Method

The EEE method is a model of activity which combines the form and the meaning in language teaching practice. The EEE is the three stages involved in the method which are Exploration, Explanation, and Expression.

The exploration stage is the stage in where learners are introduced to inductive learning. In the actual practice at this stage, learners are provided with some sentences which illustrate grammar rules like in simple past tense. The teacher then gives the learners chance to explore the sentence to find out patterns of the sentence by themselves. The teacher's role at this stage is as a facilitator, he or she may help the students in identifying the sentence pattern if necessary. As suggested by Sysoyev (1999), some grammar forms could be highlighted to make the task easier. This first step is also useful to increase learners' motivation.

The explanation stage concerns to the language form. After analysing the sentence's pattern, the learners present their finding and together with the teacher they make a conclusion about the correct pattern. Text book reference should be consulted at this stage to confirm the finding. This stage is important for developing learners' communicative competence since they will feel secure by knowing the grammar rules.

The expression stage, as the last process, is the application stage for the knowledge gained at the previous two stages. After knowing the grammatical rules, the learners are asked to apply the knowledge into practice by producing meaningful oral expression. At this stage, the teacher could provide more opportunities to the learners to use the language and practice to communicate by encouraging them to choose the topic about something that they like to talk about. This process can also help to provide authentic materials as the learners use their own sources to practice.

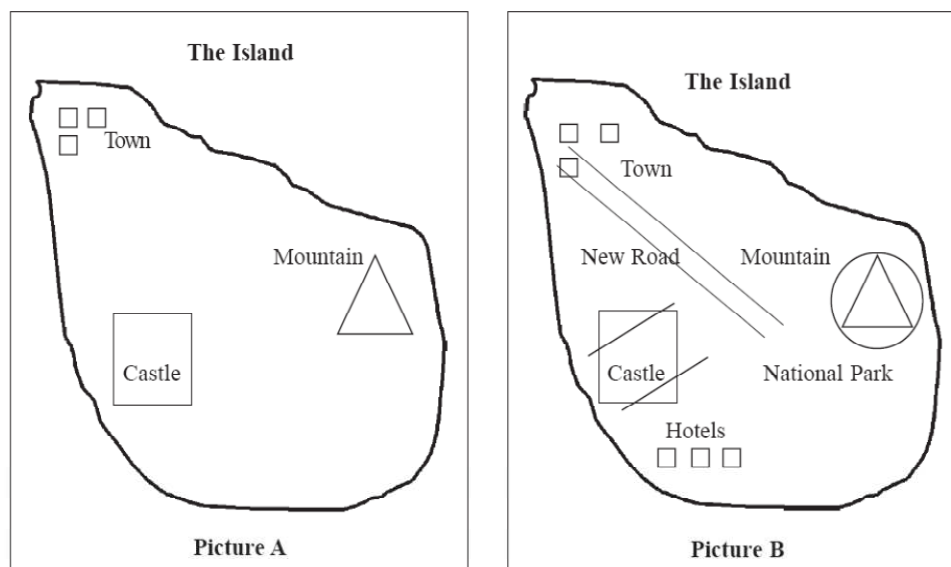
Natural Context

The natural context model is developed by Chung (2005) by adapting Ur's model (1998). One of the activities offered in this model is by comparing two pictures of an island. The first picture is representing the island five years ago and the second one is the island's picture in present condition. Dealing with the grammar, the activity can be suited to teach tenses such as Simple Past and Perfect tenses. This model can also be adapted for authentic situation by presenting the real picture of a city or places.

The activity is started by asking learners to explain the pictures (as can be seen in Picture 1) prepared by using perfect tense forms orally. A pre-communicative activity might be given to learners in the case of lack of vocabularies and language forms to perform the activity. The teacher can first start explaining the picture with his or her version as an example for the learners. After that learners are asked to do the same. As the final activity, learners are asked to compose a written report in sentences concerning their finding or the different on the two pictures. Sentences that might be generated by learners as the final task such as:

1. The castle *has been destroyed* in Picture B.
2. The mountain in Picture A *has been preserved* as a National Park.
3. A new road *has been constructed* in Picture B.

Picture 1. Chung's(2005) Model



The above two examples of activities which integrating grammar teaching into communicative activity are regarded as alternative solutions to answer the demand of many language teachers who believe in the advantages offered by grammar teaching but still want to get benefits from communicative teaching practice. By presenting this kind of activities in classroom practice of second language or foreign language learning context, English teachers can put high expectation on their learners' achievement concerning the accuracy and fluency in the target language. Padang State Polytechnics in one institution which already gets benefit from the application of these two models in English teaching and learning practice.

CONCLUSION

The emergence of Communicative Language Teaching as the application of functional method of language teaching has changed the teaching English paradigm from form-focused to function-focused. However, many teachers and practitioners are still in doubt about their learner's ability in using the target language as the final product of the language learning. In one hand, the teachers and experts realise that by focusing on form only will create learners with good accuracy but weak in fluency. Meanwhile, if the focus is on the function of language, they concern that the learners will be lack of accuracy although their fluency might be well. The fact that communication will face many obstacles if it is not backed up by good grammatical rules is already proved in many teaching for ESL / EFL context.

This condition has forced experts in language teaching to find a solution which could create a balance between focusing on forms and functions of language that could promote accuracy and fluency for the learners when using the target language. The integration of teaching grammar into CLT or usually called communicative grammar is regarded as a good answer. In communicative grammar teaching, grammar is not instructed independently but incorporated to the four language macroskills in communicative ways. Therefore, it can raise learners' grammatical and communicative competence required to perform good second or foreign language competence.

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