

Realization of “Language is Creative” in ELT

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Background

It cannot be denied that Chomsky’s theory – Language is Creative – is reflected in ELT, including in writing skill in three different conditions. The first condition is when English language learners want to choose a topic to write. If the students are given a chance to choose a topic to write, they certainly will write what they have had in mind and avoid writing what is beyond their thought. When they have decided to write what is coming to their mind, it means that they are performing language creativity because they have created their own style in expressing something. This process, in fact, meets Chomsky’s theory (1968) considering the freedom given to the students to write their own ideas as the implementation of language creativity. The second condition is when the language learners are writing down the string of their coherent sentences with the variation of grammar and vocabulary. Developing a sentence requires a grammatical pattern. Composing several sentences probably needs various grammatical patterns. It means that the more the sentences are developed, the more various the grammatical patterns will be used. Related to the implementation of “Language is Creative”, this point is one of examples because the students here are required to employ various grammatical patterns and vocabulary creatively. The third condition is when the language learners are editing what they have written down. It often happens that someone is editing his works while he is writing something and so are the English language learners. When they find something inappropriate in their works, they will revise it immediately. In addition, it usually happens that they will begin writing the new one when they find that what they have written completely does not meet their hope. The process of editing carried out by the language learners when they are writing shows language creativity they have because they can feel which one is appropriate or not. From the three points stated above, it is clear that Chomsky’s theory, Language is Creative, is realized in English language teaching.

The Concept of “Language is Creative”

Chomsky has written many books related to language study. One of them is the concept of “Language is creative”. In this theory, he states that the human ability to produce new thoughts and understand the expressions of new thought is the symbol of language creativity. It means that the participants involved in daily communication will always express and catch a lot of new thoughts automatically. This phenomenon raises a question in our mind; how can someone produce and understand many new ideas without any preparation? This article will try to present, at least, two facts about our mind to answer the question.

First, our mind has a finite stock of algorithmic rules (Chomsky, 1966). It means that our mind actually has an instruction that can determine or control us in a communication. The instruction can be related to sentence patterns and communication principles employed in daily communication. When the instruction is related to sentence patterns, it will guide the language user to choose what pattern will be used for an expression or utterance. In addition, a reader or listener with good grammar competence will feel interrupted when s/he finds an ungrammatical sentence or utterance. For example, when someone wants to perform a command, s/he will utter an imperative sentence. It will be strange if s/he use a declarative sentence to perform an imperative. The, when the instruction is related to communication principles, it will lead the language user to two principles; cooperative and politeness principles. In cooperative principle, the people involved in a communication should perform collaboration. None may be selfish in order to keep a harmony in the communication. In politeness principle, all participants involved in the communication should appreciate each other. They have to express and respond the new

thoughts politely. A speaker should avoid using expression that can make audience or interlocutor embarrassed or ashamed. As an illustration, let us see the following example:

A: We will miss Merry and Zuzane when we are far from them

B: yes, we will miss Merry

The statement uttered by B indirectly will make Zuzane offended because he responds A's statement and only mentions Merry's name only while Zuzane is with them. He responds like that as if he did not like Zuzane

Second, our mind has stock of lexical entries. These properties will help a reader or listener to comprehend a text or an utterance received. When a reader finds an unfamiliar word (not stored in the stock of lexical entries) in a text, his mind will try to analyze it based on the available context around the text. Furthermore, human mind can respond immediately a strange or an incorrect word received. Let us see two examples below:

1. *saya menemankan Anto ke MATOS* (Indonesia language)
2. *We goed to Bali yesterday* (English)

For Indonesian people, the first example is a wrong sentence. Our mind cannot receive suffix –kan for teman because the correct suffix for teman in Indonesia language is –i. So it should be *saya menemani Anto ke MATOS*. The second example is also incorrect because there is no suffix for verb go. Because the principle stored in our mind is that verb II of go is went, the sentence should be we went to Bali yesterday. The two examples above implicitly represents Birnbaum's concept (1990) stating that human mind can know the meanings of infinitely many sentences. It means that our mind can detect which sentence can be acceptable or not.

From the two points mentioned above, it is obvious that the language creativity appears because the human mind consists of properties that can make someone express and understand the new ideas creatively.

How can the theory of "Language is Creative" meet ELT?

It is a fact that learning is a creativity because the learning itself is full of activity that requires creativity. So does language learning. Creativity in language learning cannot be bargained because the purpose of creativity employed in form of exercises and tasks is to make language learners accustomed to using the language. The theory of "Language is creative" in English language teaching (ELT) is a reality that language learning shows creativity in some ways.

First, creativity in listening is reflected in form of an activity in which listeners, as they listen, process not only what they hear but also connect it to other information they have already known (Helgesen, 2003:23). In addition, the language learners still can show language creativity (in listening) by imitating the way the native speaker pronounce any word when they are listening to English song having the script of the song. Therefore, they are always required to show their language creativity in listening activity, especially when they should respond to what they are listening.

Second, the theory of "Language is creative" is also reflected in speaking skill. A large percentage of the world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in Speaking (Richrds & Renandy, 2002: 201). Therefore, this skill is often considered as a measurement for some people to say that someone is good at English. This skill is also the main goal for some people, who want to work abroad, to attend an English course. There are many ways language learners can do to master speaking skill, such as having conversation with classmate or close friend everyday or having conversation with tourist. Usually, the language learners show a great creativity when they meet and talk to a foreigner because having a chance to speak to foreigner is a certain pride for them. They do not care where the foreigner is from. The important thing for them is the foreigner can speak English and they have a chance to speak with foreigner. The creativity appearing in conversation is that the learners will do their best to make their utterances understandable (their pronunciation and sentences should be correct) and they also have to understand ideas uttered to them

Third, reading skill in ELT also can require the high language creativity. When a language learner has a text, he will find some realities about text features; how the writer formulates a title, how the writer expresses main ideas, how the writer provides supporting details, etc. Anderson (2003: 68) states that a good reader knows what to do when they encounter difficulties. Therefore, when he is reading the text, his creativity is required to comprehend everything about the text. For example;

- Chomsky (a famous linguist) has written many books
- Rendang, popular food from Padang, tastes delicious

When the language learner finds such sentences as above, probably he first does not know who Chomsky is and what Rendang is. But after he has understood the meaning of the phrase in bracket and phrase among commas, he certainly will know that Chomsky is a famous linguist and Rendang is a popular food from Padang. There are many such sentences as above presented in the text and it requires students' creativity to comprehend the sentences. Without having creativity, the language learner will have trouble comprehending the text with more various features.

At last, English language learners will perform globally the creativity in form of written works done completely. Good language learners certainly want to master writing skill well. To achieve the wish, they should work hard to practice writing skill based on good writing procedures because someone can master writing skill through intensive course (Alwasilah & Alwasilah, 2005: 43). They may not depend on their teacher only. There are many activities that can be done creatively to improve writing skill without teacher's existence, for example, writing diary. This activity is full of creativity because the language learners can write everything they find in their daily life. This activity reminds me of activity I did when attending an English course in 1989. At that time, my English instructor always asked us to write 5 sentences about different activities and moment related to daily activity. The tasks were collected every weekend. After we did the activity for one month, the activity, in fact, could help us to get progress (our English was better) because in writing diary, we also directly developed vocabulary and grammar competence at the same time. As well as grammar and vocabulary competence, the writing activity also develops creativity in form of discourse competence. From this point, it can be concluded that writing activity is actually the form of language creativity for language learner because there are some competencies they are developing when they are writing.

Conclusion

From what have been discussed above, it can be concluded that the concept of "language is creative" is always implemented and required in ELT because the language creativity performed by students will support them to develop their English language competence. The language creativity is especially implemented in language skills involving language components because the language skill cannot be separated from language components. The language creativity cannot be ignored in ELT because it plays an important role to the success of language learner in mastering English. Therefore the language creativity will always be available in ELT classes.

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