

# Out of Class Peer Group Discussion in Learning Basic English Grammar and Its Impact on the Students' Grammatical Knowledge

*Wisma Yunita*

English Education Study Program, University of Bengkulu

I\_wish\_0702@yahoo.com

## Abstract

The broad scope of knowledge on English grammar while the number of course credits offered in the curriculum of an English study program at university is limited made the grammar teachers seek for ways to keep on transferring the knowledge to the students to their best. One of the ways to reach the aim is by using out of class peer group discussion in the teaching and learning of English grammar. This research is a descriptive research aiming at finding out the impact of using out of class peer discussion in learning Basic English grammar. The subject of the research was 38 freshmen students of the English Education study program of University of Bengkulu enrolled in 2013-2014 academic year who took a course named Structure I. The data was taken by using eight open questions given to the students and by using students' individual and group study journal which was analyzed by using Gay and Airasian (2000). The research result shows that the students have better English grammar knowledge, become more confident in speaking English, become closer to their friends, feel happier and more comfortable to learn in group with their own classmates, can share ideas and knowledge with others and are more confident in using English language.

**Keywords:** Basic English Grammar, out of class group discussion, and grammatical knowledge.

## Introduction

Grammar is a part of language knowledge. To be able to use a language, one should have enough knowledge on how to use it. English language is a language used widely all around the world and it has its own rules. The rules can be learnt in a formal and informal education institution. One of them is at the English Education study program of University of Bengkulu which aims at producing qualified English teachers. To reach the goal, the curriculum is designed in such a way that it can give them enough knowledge and skills of English language teaching. One of its subjects named Structure I which is the basic part of Structure course given to the students to provide them with the basic knowledge of English structure (i.e. nouns, verbs, adjective, adverb, article, and preposition) and the English tenses (i.e. Simple Present Tense, Simple Past tense, etc). In further, it is also designed to provide them with the competence of using the basic structure of English receptively and productively. In this paper, the writer will discuss about the basic English grammar taught to the students, the use of out of class peer group discussion and its impacts on the students' grammatical knowledge.

### *Grammatical Knowledge*

Grammar is the rules of how a language works in the formation of a meaning. Harmer (2003) states that grammar is the description of the ways in which words can change their forms and can be combined into sentences in a language. In addition, Richards, Platt and Weber (2003) mentions that grammar is a description of the structure of a language and the way in which units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in the language. Thus, grammar is about rules or ways of arranging a sentence. Having knowledge about the grammar of a language is important for those who learn a language such as English language even though it has a broad scope and there are many things to learn related to English language grammar.

Knowledge on how English grammar works is very important in order to communicate in English well. Without a proper knowledge on the grammar, it will affect one's ability in producing the language either in spoken or in written. This is in line to what proposed by Yan (2006) that grammar is the bone of a language and Crystal (2004) mentioned that grammar is the language's heartbeats. In addition, Borjars and Burridge (2010) states that a knowledge of English grammatical structures is helpful when ones are learning the grammatical structure of another language, or having to teach them to others.

In further, Crystal in Tuan and Doan (2010) says,

Grammar is the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. The more we are aware of how it works, the more we can monitor the meaning and effectiveness of the way we and others use language. It can help foster precision, detect ambiguity, and exploit the richness of expression available in English. Additionally, it can help everyone, not only teachers of English, but teachers of anything for all teaching grammar is ultimately a matter of getting to grips with meaning

From those opinions, it can be inferred that English grammar is pivotal in learning English. Without a proper knowledge on how English grammar works, it will impossible for a meaningful communication to take place moreover to teach them to others.

Grammar as a part of English language knowledge has a broad scope and it difficult to be learnt. In learning English grammar, the basic knowledge a learner should have is the knowledge about *parts of speech*. It is a fundamental knowledge which covers the knowledge about nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, articles and quantifiers (Parrot, 2000). Harmer (2003) named these parts of speech as word classes and the operation of this word classes is where words and phrases on the one hand and grammar on the other meet up. When someone has good knowledge on how this word class operates, such as nouns, he will know what other words will occur in a phrase or a sentence and where it can be put syntactically.

In addition, if a sentence is looked in detail, it can be seen that it contains those parts of speech or word classes. The following figure will show what a sentence is comprised of;

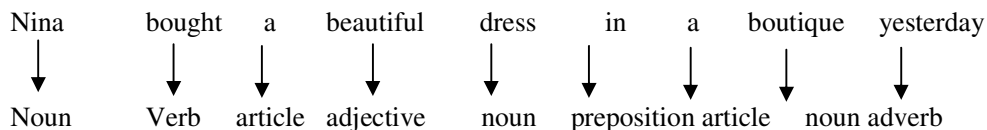


Figure 1: Basic types of words in a sentence

From the sentence above, it can be seen that the sentence is comprised of nouns, a verb, an adjective, an adverb, articles, and a preposition. Those words are the parts of speech or the word classes which are categorized into Basic English grammar needed to be learnt at the very beginning of learning English grammar.

#### Out of Class Peer Group Discussion

Group discussion is defined as a group of students interacting verbally or non-verbally about a particular topic or issue that is becoming their concerns. Since the scope of English grammar is quite wide to be taught to students. It needs a way that can still make it possible for the students to learn the English grammar maximally. In Indonesian context, a class can usually be big consisted of 35-40 students, therefore one of the best ways is to learn English in groups. Therefore, using group discussion will be a good solution as in this way a group member can share his knowledge to other group members and vice versa. Learning in group will make the students feel free to ask without afraid of making mistakes and via cooperation they may be able to progress faster than they could do on their own (Lantolf in Jacobs and Goh:2007). Group discussion mostly take place in class during the process of teaching and learning but it is also possible to do it out of class in order to make the students learn more about the English grammar they have not fully understand in the classroom.

In this context of learning English grammar in Structure I class at the English Education Study Program of University of Bengkulu, the writer who taught the subject, formed study groups among the students or peer group discussion out of the class. The group members were determined by the teacher by considering the students performance during the first half of the semester (before mid-test) and their scores in mid-test. In addition, the teacher also asked them to uncover what problems they encountered during the learning of English grammar, their weaknesses and what they would do to improve their knowledge of English grammar. From the discussion, it can be inferred that most of them wanted to learn more outside of the class with their classmates who were better than them. Then, they were being grouped into a group of five students which will bring a better result and asked to learn the English grammar more out of the class with their classmates until the semester ended. Finally, at the end of the semester the students are asked to answer eight questions related to the study and the impact of the out of class peer group discussion on their grammatical knowledge, and submitted their individual and group reports related to what they have learnt in the group discussion out of the class.

## Discussion

The discussion of this paper would be presented in accordance to the question given to the students. The questions were related to the group discussion itself (covering the time, the place, the difficult aspect of grammar, and the aspects of grammar they learnt) and the impact of the out of class peer group discussion on their grammatical knowledge, motivation in learning grammar, confident in using grammar, the feeling of learning in group with peer and other impacts of learning in peer group discussion out of the class.

How many times did you do the out of class peer group discussion? And how long was it in each meeting?

Most of the students stated that they did the discussion for 4 times during two month, while some others did it for 8, 7 and 5 times as in the following statements;

“We did the discussion for 4 times” (Diana)

“We did the discussion for 8 times with my group” (Alheru)

Then, when it was from how long the discussion took place, the students mostly did the discussion for two hours in each meeting, and then some did it 3 and 1 hour.

“We did the discussion for about two hours in each meeting” (Hakika)

“We did the discussion for three hours” (Anggi)

From the result above, it can be inferred that the students learnt in group once in two weeks in average and most of them did the discussion for two hours in average. Doing discussion for two hours is good for them as if it is longer than that the focus on the learning will be lessen and the member will start to feel bored.

Where did you do the group discussion?

Most of the students did the group discussion in campus areas and the places were varies such as in Taman Pintar in front of the FKIP building, at University library, at university language center, at university student’s center, under the trees nearby the parking area of GB III (study center for FKIP students) and in the students’ house as stated by the following students;

“We did the group discussion at Taman Pintar in front of the Dekanat FKIP Building” (Dhea Rizky)

“We did our discussion under the trees nearby the parking area at GB III” (Chindy Yolanda)

From the result, it can be inferred that the students tend to choose places that gave them convenience and relax situation and are different from a formal classroom teaching and

learning. Taman Pintar is an open space nearby FKIP building which is provided by the faculty as a place for studying equipped with proper tables and chairs under shady leafy trees.

What are the most difficult and the easiest aspects of grammar for you to learn?

Among all parts of speech, the students found out that the most difficult aspect of the English grammar to learn is *Nouns* as stated below;

“It is so hard for me to differentiate each type of nouns” (Dwi Wulandari)

“I am still confused about the predicate noun and adjective noun because I could not answer the question about it when I did the Mid-test” (Fara)

While the easiest one is *Articles* and *Prepositions* as stated in the followings;

“I understand how to use English articles well and I feel happy” (Venty)

“I think preposition is quite easy to be learnt and I can understand them more” (Eva)

From the statements above, it can be seen that Noun is the most difficult parts to learn for the students. This condition caused by the fact that there are many types of nouns to be understood and it can be changed from other class of words. Most complete sentences usually have more than one noun and the form of the nouns is also different.

What aspect of grammar did you learn in the group discussion?

The students mostly learnt about tenses (the verbs), the nouns and the adjectives. They also admitted that the verbs and the nouns were very difficult to be learnt. While the least aspect they learnt was prepositions. The following statements will reveal what most of the students learnt in the group discussion.

“I learnt about tenses such as simple future tenses, future progressive tense and future perfect tenses. I did it when my friend was explaining the material to us” (Puspita)

“We discuss about abstract nouns and concrete nouns, nouns as appositive and as possessive modifier. We also learn about nouns as an adjective because it is the most difficult things” (Reza Rezita)

“We learnt all about adjectives in our course book and we learnt it again and again to understand the adjective well” (Annisa)

From the statement above, it can be seen that most of the students discussed the verbs, nouns and the adjectives. They discussed them because those parts of speech are difficult for them to be understood since those three parts have a lot of types and forms and have various positions in sentences.

What is the impact of learning by using group discussion on your grammatical knowledge?

Learning by using peer group discussion out of the class gave a lot of impact to the students. Most of them stated that they can share ideas and knowledge together, can understand the English grammar more, feel comfortable to be in group and do not shy to ask questions, and can have more time to study the English grammar. These impacts can be seen in the following statements of the students;

“By using group discussion, it makes me feel more comfortable to learn about grammar. I don’t need to be shy” (Hakika)

“We can share our ideas together in group and get our problem solved” (Desi)

“It helps me to understand and learn more about grammar” (Sinci)

From the statements above, it can be concluded that the students feel more comfortable in learning English, understand material of English grammar more, and can share ideas and solve problem related to English grammar. This is in line to Lantolf in Jacobs and Goh (2007) mentions that via cooperation the students may be able to progress faster than they could do on their own.

What is the impact of learning by using group discussion on your motivation to learn English grammar?

Using peer group discussion in learning English grammar motivate the students to learn more from other and became smarter, to speak English by using correct grammar, like to learn English and have good spirit to study English grammar, and write what they think in English. The following are the students' statements related to their motivation to learn English grammar;

“When I didn't know about verbs, one of my friends knew about it. I could ask him. It gives me motivation to learn more about grammar” (Diana)

“I want to write what I think by using good English grammar” (Reza Rezita)

“I have a high spirit to study about grammar so that I will know more about it”(Sumartini)

Based on the statements above, it can be inferred that studying in group made the students have more motivation to learn more about English grammar. Motivation is needed in learning English grammar for without good motivation any learning will not work well as stated by Thornbury (1999) that motivation is one of the basic principles for learning grammar, and it is believed that learning grammar cannot take place under any conditions if there is lack of motivation.

How do you feel about learning English grammar out of class with your peers?

Most of the students felt happy, grateful, and relax in learning English grammar. In addition, they also felt more confident to speak in English as in the following statements:

“I felt so happy and grateful because I can share my knowledge and idea together with my friends” (Raty)

“I feel it is not really formal when I learn English with my peers. We do not need to be really serious and we just laugh and can talk about interesting topics as an intermezzo” (Alheru)

“Learning in group has a great effect to me because I can speak English by using good grammar and I feel so confident” (Siska)

From the statement above, it is clear that the students were happier in learning grammar, more confident and enjoy learning grammar in their group. Studying in group does bring on a positive social aspect. Share problem faced during the learning with other group member can help and bring a little more enjoyable to the learning.

Are there any other impacts of learning with peer group English grammar in the group out of the class?

Learning English grammar in group with their own classmates gives the students the feeling of closer to their own classmates, know their friends better, and make them braver to speak English than before. In addition, it also helps them in doing the other subject such as writing, and make them able to manage their study time at home better as stated by the following students;

“The impact is I can understand the real problem of learning English grammar. I feel closer to my friends, feel comfortable to talk about my problem with them because they know the problem and I can ask their suggestions to solve my problem” (Hakika)

“Learning in group with my peers make me closer to my friends, help me in doing other tasks either it is individual or group tasks” (Yeyen)

From those statements, it can be inferred that the students know their friends better. There is more time to interact and build a better relationship among the group members. This is in line to Erhman and Dornyei in Dornyei and Murphy (2009) who mention that one characteristic feature of a group is that there is interaction among group members.

## Conclusion

Learning English grammar out of class in group with their peers make the students have better English grammar knowledge, become more confident in speaking English, become closer to their friends, feel happier and more comfortable to learn in group with their own classmates, can share ideas and knowledge with others and are more confident in using English language. Based on this study, it is suggested to the grammar teachers at university to make group discussions out of the class for the students and monitor their activities. In addition, it is also suggested to do a further research in using out of class peer group discussion for the other subjects which have a broad scope of knowledge to be transferred to the students such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, ELT methodology, and introduction to linguistics.

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