LINGUISTICS AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Effendy Gultom

Department of English Language Teaching, the University of Riau Pekanbaru, Indonesia
effendygultom@gmail.com

Abstract

Linguistics is needed in English language teaching because it helps teachers explain the English components and structures to the students. Every language has a system or linguistic rules that can be learned in terms of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. However, English language teaching should be incorporated with other fields such as psychology, education, cognitive science, anthropology, language acquisition, sociology, bilingualism, and language teaching. Knowing the Students is very important for the teacher in order to create condusive classroom atmospheres. The teacher needs to have empathy and patience toward the students and he should be able to place himself in the students' position. In general, the purpose of English teaching is to enable the students to use the language for communication fluently and appropriately both in oral and written forms. In order to achieve this purpose, the teacher must realize that the students are not blank spaces that can be filled with knowledge. The teacher can function as a coach, moderator, or adviser but he should give freedom to the students to experiment, ask questions, and express their ideas. Teaching English as a foreign language involves a lot of knowledge and strategies. An English teacher is expected to know the students and teaching objectives, the subject matter, some teaching methods, and broad general knowledge. Furthermore, an English teacher must have strong motivation in doing his job in order to be a good model for the students.

Key words: linguistics, English language teaching

Introduction

Language is a means of communication of thoughts and feelings. Everyone needs language to survive and get progress in life. Some people use only their native language and they have limited access to other people. But many people strive to learn or acquire other languages in order to get more success in life. One of the languages being chosen is English due to its strategic function in the world.

Millions of people learn English as a second or foreign language because it is probably the most international language all over the world. In relation to that, efforts have been put on how to make the English teaching more effective. The English language teaching has become an important activity to enable people to use the language both in oral and written forms.

In Indonesia, English is taught beginning from elementary school level up to the university level. It is a required subject for enrollment to a higher level of education, especially for graduate and post-graduate studies. The role of English has become increasingly important for international trades, commerce, and tourism. We can probably say that English has become the language of the world. A lot of people all over the world are interested in learning English in order to succeed in various fields, particularly for the higher education levels.

Due to the increasingly important role of English, it is necessary for us to improve the quality of English language teaching through a better understanding of good teaching methods that are suitable and applicable for our students. We need to understand the nature of language and the nature of language learning. In order to understand the nature of language we need to learn linguistics.

Brief Review of Related Theories

Linguistics is needed in English language teaching because it helps teachers explain the English components and structures to the students. Linguistics is a source of theories about the organization and structure of language and it can be applied for teaching methods. Applied linguistics can help teachers in developing a methodology based on a carefully graded grammatical and lexical syllabus with the following characteristics: the syllabus is structured with graded vocabulary levels, meaningful presentation of structures in contexts through the use of situations to contextualize new teaching points, and the sequence of classroom activities starts from presentation to controlled practice, to freer production. This is also called structural-situational approach (Richards, 2001).

There are different theories concerning language teaching and learning and each has strengths and weaknesses. Some of the famous theories spring from behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructionism. Some methods of teaching that have been applied by language teachers are the following: Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Structural Method, Reading Method, Audio-lingual Method, Situational Method,

and Communicative Approach. Behaviorism stresses on student's observable behavior to create automatic learning, including the use of instructional cues, practice, and reinforcement. The role of the teacher is to determine what type of cues that can produce the desired response, to create conducive situations to achieve the target by providing stimuli in conducive environmental condition.

According to behaviorists, second language acquisition is the acquisition of a new behavior. The environment is the most important factor in learning which involves developing responses to environmental stimuli. If the responses receive positive reinforcement, they will become habits. If the responses receive punishment, they will be abandoned. Therefore, the students learn a language through habit formation. Students learn a language by imitating sounds and structures that they hear in the environment. Language learning is considered similar to any other kind of learning. Learning consists of developing responses to environmental stimuli. To learn a second or foreign language, a student must imitate correct models repeatedly (Patten & Williams, 2008)

Richards, et. al. (1986) stated that behaviorism has an important influence on psychology, education, and language teaching. Behavior is interpreted in terms of stimulus and response. The process of language teaching can be explained in terms of conditioning, a process of shaping and molding of behavior. Desired behavior is induced, whereas undesirable behavior is extinguished. According to Eapen, some implications of behaviorism toward language teaching and learning are as follows: Language is learnt only through use and practice and it cannot be taught without context or situation. Production of correct linguistic response requires effort and attention. The spoken language comes before the written form. Learning is faster when the learner is placed in a situation and when the correct response to a stimulus is immediately confirmed or reinforced by further practice.

Structural linguistics contributes to the emergence of Audio-lingual method based on the theory of behaviorism which states that language learning depends on habit formation. Bloomfield (1942:12) stated that language learning is overlearning and anything less is becoming useless. The implication of this statement is that students should repeat a certain pattern until they master it and it becomes automatic. Teaching techniques utilize repetition of dialogs and pattern practice for the purpose of automatization. According to Rivers (1964), Audiolingualism has the assumptions that habits are strengthened by reinforcement, foreign language habits are formed by giving the right response, and language behavior can be learned by inducing student to behave. Positive reinforcement of accurate imitations and correction of inaccurate imitation facilitates the learning process. Active student participation is an important element of the learning process. Ideal learning conditions occur when there are plenty of accurate models and immediate constant feedback. Students should be exposed to a lot of target language examples They should imitate the target language examples repeatedly and receive appropriate feedback. An English teacher is expected to know linguistics or applied linguistics so that they can give feedback and correction to the students.

Cognitivism stresses on the process that occurs inside the human mind, the acquisition of language, and the internal mental structure. The role of the teacher is to understand the position of the students who have different experiences that will influence the learning outcomes, the teacher also determines the most effective manner to organize new information and provide feedback. Chomsky stated that human language cannot be explained simply in terms of observable stimuli and responses. The generative transformational linguist is interested not only in describing language, but also in arriving at an explanatory level of adequacy in language study. According to cognitive psychologists, meaning, understanding and knowing are significant data for psychological study. They try to discover underlying motivations and deeper structures of human behavior using rational approach.

The learning processes according to the cognitivists are as follows:

The learner considers a new situation as a problem to be solved. The learner analyzes the problem and tries to identify the elements or components of the new situation. The new situation is compared with the previously encountered situation using a mental 'filing index' system to find out if it is similar or different. The comparison will result in a plan or strategy to deal with the new situation by testing it. The plan is tried out to see if it works or not. If it works, it is stored in the filing system for future use. But if it does not work, it is abandoned. According to Gass (2003), interaction in language learning is stimulated by communicative pressure and examines the relationship between communication and acquisition and the mechanisms such as noticing and attention that mediate between them. Input refers to the language that is exposed to the learner and it is an essential component for learning in the sense that it provides the crucial evidence from which learners can form linguistic hypotheses. Interaction refers to the conversations that learners participate in. Interactions provide learners with information about the correctness and incorrectness of their utterances. Long (1996) stated that there is a strong relationship between interaction and learning. Interaction approach attempts to account for learning through the learner's exposure to language, production of language, and

feedback on that production. Interaction and learning can be linked using cognitive concept derived from psychology, such as noticing, working memory, and attention.

Constructivism stresses on how to construct the meaning of a word or thing based on the student's understanding. It can be carried out through individual experience and schema. The role of the teacher is to ask the students to learn to construct meaning, assimilate and accommodate the student' prior learning to the new ones. Brown (2001) stated that constructivism is a school of thought that emphasizes the learner's role in constructing meaning out of available linguistic input and the importance of social interaction in creating a new linguistic system. According to Taber (2006), constructivism theory has the following characteristics: Knowledge is actively constructed by the learner, not passively received from outside. Learning is something done by the learner, not something that is imposed on the learner. Learners come to the learning situation with existing ideas about many phenomena. Some of these ideas are ad hoc and unstable; others are more deeply rooted and well developed. Learners have their own individual knowledge and understanding about the world, but there are also similarities and common patterns in their ideas. Some of these ideas are socially and culturally accepted and shared and they are often part of the language, supported by metaphors etc. Language teaching has to take the learner's existing ideas seriously. Learners construct their knowledge through collaborative interaction with the physical world in social, cultural, and linguistic environment.

There are different varieties of English and the distinctive features can be described and taught through the use of appropriately selected texts and carefully – devised practice exercises ' (Howatt, 1984:222). Basic language is made up of sentence patterns, structural or functional words and non-structural vocabulary which are common to all scientific disciplines and form the essential framework upon which the special vocabulary of each discipline is superimposed (Ewer and Latorre, 1969:ix). But in general, it is always better to start teaching English for general purposes first before teaching English for specific purposes. The reason is that the general English is basic or fundamental for communication. It is not likely that the students will be able to handle English for specific purposes without being able to use general English.

There are many theories related to second language learning and acquisition. The theories may be related to other fields of knowledge and science. For example, according to psychology some people read and comprehend written texts faster and better than others. People vary in their ability to retain information in their memory. In other words, people vary in their working memory capacity, in the sense that some people have greater capacities for processing information compared with others. (Patten and Williams, 2007) Generative linguistic theory on second language acquisition tries to explain and account for the nature and acquisition of interlanguage competence (White, 2003). Language use is assumed to be based on an abstract linguistic system, a mental representation of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. The knowledge of language is unconscious and it is derived from Universal Grammar. Our knowledge of language goes beyond the input in numerous ways. People can understand and produce sentences that they have never heard before and they know that certain structures are not grammatical without being taught. They also know that certain interpretations of sentences are not possible in certain contexts.

Data Analysis and Discussion

There have been so many methods of teaching English as a second or foreign language offered by experts. Each of them has strengths and weaknesses. There is no single method that can overcome all English teaching problems. Things depend on the objectives of teaching English as a second or foreign language. Some courses focus on reading ability and therefore they use various reading methods to achieve their goals. Others may stress on the ability to speak and as a result they offer using dialogs and conversations until the students are capable of expressing their ideas using English.

Titone (1968) mentions two basic held positions in English language teaching. The first is form-focused teaching which emphasizes the teaching of the rules of grammar, structures, the vocabulary development, and the language sounds. The second is meaning-focused teaching which emphasizes language use, communication fluency and appropriateness of expressions in different situations. Applied linguists focus on the fields of linguistics and psychology to provide more effective teaching methodology. Corder (1968) stated that applied linguistics is a collection of applications of linguistics at various levels of language teaching operation. Cook and Wei (2009) stated that applied linguistics is an interdisciplinary field. It can deal with practical language and communication problems by identifying, analyzing, and solving processes utilizing available theories and methods. Rosenbaum (1966) mentions two objects of linguistic research; they are : to determine precisely the constrains or rules that govern the form of the constructs employed in the linguistic description of human language, and to determine the particular instances of the descriptive constructs of human language.

Halliday, McIntosh, and Steevens (1965) mentioned that linguistics is very relevant and useful to second language teaching. Linguistic description of language components of language teaching is very useful for language teachers. Language teachers receive knowledge of linguistic theory to teach language. Linguistics contributes to the theory of language teaching. The knowledge of linguistic theory is used as a device to help language teachers. Chomsky (1964) considers the grammar of language as something that enables us to specify rules which constitute competence in a native speaker.

But we can probably say that linguistics cannot be separated from language teaching world. We can see, for example, the contribution of phonology in enabling teachers to diagnose the students ' problems in pronouncing words and then give them feedback for correction. By knowing articulatory phonetics, English teachers can give solutions to the students' pronunciation problems. From morphology, teachers and students can learn and analyze the word formation process in order to get better perception of words being studied. For example, they can understand that words are composed of roots and affixes and hence can figure out the resulting meaning of words. From syntax, teachers and students can learn and understand the construction of words to become phrases, clauses, and sentences. For instance, a grammar can allow movement of elements in the sentence, such as: you said what? or What did you say? Hence, they will be able to construct correct utterances or sentences. Semantics contributes to a better comprehension of utterances or sentences.

In addition, we need to understand social factors that influence the student's success in learning or acquiring English. Student's learning occurs when he or she participates in family life and peer group interactions. We can observe that the more often people practice the language, the better they will be in using the language . When interactions occur in natural ways we can expect the students to acquire the second or foreign language. Language acquisition needs constant practice and the students must be encouraged to use the target language all the time so that they will be fluent and effective in using the language for communication.

Conversely, when people do not use a second language for a long time, they will get difficulties in expressing their ideas using the language, or at least they will feel awkward to use the language.

However, the success of English teaching depends to a large extent on the quality or competence of the teacher in running the English program. Some of the qualities that an English teacher needs to employ are the following : to establish a good rapport to the students by having good personality and communicating enthusiasm for the subject matter, to employ various techniques to teach new lessons in clear and interesting ways by relating language forms, functions and meaning to contexts relevant to the students' interest, and to employ various activities to develop the four language skills : listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Last but not least, the teacher is expected to be a good language model for the students.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Despite the many teaching methods that are available for English teachers, it is necessary to select the ones suitable for our teaching purposes. The students' needs must become the focus of our attention and instruction. The success of our English teaching depends on the students' achievement in terms of the objectives already determined before the program starts. English teachers must be open minded and ready to continue learning and striving for better teaching results. All necessary information and knowledge must be utilized to make the English teaching successful. It is necessary for English teachers to realize that the students have different background knowledge and learning styles. Therefore, the teacher must provide different techniques to guide the students during the teaching learning process. Linguistics is a good source for English teachers to be used in their teaching career because it is a scientific study of language. Every language has a system and it can be explained by linguistic knowledge. English teachers must be able to select instructional materials such as books, journals, audio-video tape recorders and cassettes, self-access and computerized language instruction to facilitate language learning so that the students can achieve effective language learning (Richards, 2001:230)

We need to realize that language teaching methods might change from time to time just like fashions. But we can always judge whether a certain method is suitable for our purposes. It is important for us to be open-minded and ready to try new methods for the purpose of improving the quality of our English teaching. English language teaching needs a lot of knowledge and strategies. A good English teacher must be highly motivated to carry out his job. It will be an advantage when an English teacher enjoys teaching because he will be able to motivate his students to learn. He should establish rapport and develop students' motivation.

References

Boey, L.K. (1975). An Introduction to Linguistics for the Language Teacher. Singapore: Singapore University Press.

Brown, H. D. (2000). Principles of Language Learning (4th ed.). New York: Longman.

Chomsky, N. (1964). Current Issues in Linguistic Theory. In J. Fodor and J. Katz (Eds., The Structure of Language: Readings in the Philosophy of Language). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Cook, V. & L. Wei. (2009). Contemporary Applied Linguistics. Continuum International Publising Group.

Corder, P.S. (1968). Advanced Study and the Experienced Teacher. In Perren, G.F. (ed. Teacher of English as a Second Language). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eapen, R. (1995). Methods of Teaching English, Block II The Context of Language Teaching. Department of Distance Education Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages: Hyderabad, 500 007, India.

Ewer, J.R. and G. Lattore. (1969). A Course in Basic Scientific English. London: Longman.

Gass, S & Selinker, L. (2001). Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Halliday, M.A.K.A. McIntosh and P. Steevens. (1965). The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching. London: Longmans.

Howatt, A. P. R. (1984). A History of English Language Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hughes, Arthur. (1989). Testing for Language Teachers. New York: Cambridge University Press

Long, M.H. (2001). Focus on Form: A Design Feature in Language Teaching Methodology. In C.N: Candlin & N. Mercer (Eds.) English Language Teaching in Its Social Context (pp. 180-190). London: Routledge.

Patten and Williams. (2003). Theories in Second Language Acquisition. New York: Routledge

Paltridge, Brian. (2006). Discourse Analysis. London: Continuum

Richards, J. C. & T. Rodgers. (1986). Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. New York: Cambridge Press University.

Richards, Jack C. (2001).Curriculum Development in Language Teaching. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rosenbaum, P. (ed. J.A. J.T. Fleming and H. M. Popp). (1966). `On the Role of Linguistics in the Teaching of English" in Language Learning. New York.

Taber, K.S. (2006). Beyond Constructivism: The Progressive Research Programme into Learning Science Studies in Science Education, 42: 125-184.

Titone, R. (1968). Teaching Foreign Languages. Georgetown University Press.

White, R. 1988. The ELT Curriculum. Oxford: Blackwell.