INCREASING STUDENTS' MOTIVATION
TO LEARN ENGLISH GRAMMAR THROUGH POETRY

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Abstract

The problem that interests the writer to write this paper is that many students, even those of English major, lack of motivation to learn English Grammar. As predicted, they usually have poor grammar mastery. Therefore, an alternative solution is presented here: using poetry to teach English Grammar. The purpose of the research article to show the readers how the uses of poetry can increase students' motivation in learning English Grammar. Based on the collected data through interview, questionnaire, and observation during English Grammar teaching and learning process, poetry is proved effective to increase students' motivation to learn English Grammar. The increase of the students' motivation might be caused by the combination of three different methods of when teaching grammar using poetry, namely: using rules, using examples, and using texts to teach grammar. When using poetry to teach English Grammar, English teachers can insert into the poetry English Grammar rules, examples of English Grammatical points, and make the poetry itself as the text. The combination of the three methods of teaching grammar is proved to give much better results, based on the writer's observation on students learning English Grammar at her college, based on the data collected through questionnaire, and based on the students own information when they were interviewed.

Key words: Learning English Grammar, Poetry, Students' motivation

Introduction

There are disputes of statements about the importance of grammar in a language teaching and learning (Thornbury, 1999), those who state that grammar is very important ((Ur, 1988; and Hutchhinson in Thornbury: 1999) and those are not in line with them (Krashen and Lewis in Thornbury: 1999). The disputes of statements might happen if the context of grammar teaching and learning is not clearly defined: whether the teaching learning context is as a second language or that of a foreign language. In the countries, where English is used as a second language, English grammar teaching is not important. The reason is that the second language learners are exposed with the language every day since English is used in people's daily communication. However, in the countries, where English is not used in people's daily communication (English as a foreign language), English grammar teaching is undoubtedly very imperative, especially for adult learners, since it is helpful and, even essential to a speedy learning process if appropriate techniques are used (Brown, 1994). .

Despite the importance of grammar to help our students use English correctly and appropriately (McKay, 1987), many foreign language learners are lacking of motivation in learning grammar. This might caused by factors, such as, the learners themselves, the English teachers, the teaching techniques, or others. Related to the teacher factor, many roles that English teachers can play in a language teaching, namely as directors, managers, facilitators, resources or any other roles (Brown, 1994; Harmer, 2001). In the context of English grammar teaching and learning, the teacher can facilitate the process of the students' grammar learning in order to make the students' learning easier. One of the ways that the teacher can use is by selecting and implementing interesting techniques. This article therefore will discuss the use of poetry as a teaching technique to increase students' motivation to learn grammar.

B. Review of Related Theories

Grammatical competence is seen in terms of process as well as product (Nunan, 2000). In order to have grammatical competence, foreign language learners can learn it by themselves or be taught by their foreign language teachers, through two different ways: implicitly (through reading, listening, tasks students are performing, the course books the teachers are using, exposing students to examples and working out for themselves, and discovering) or explicitly (through grammar presentation and practice activities, telling about grammar) (Harmer, 2004) or inductively (in which the students infer the rule of grammar from a set of examples) and deductively (the students apply the rule to examples) (Richards, et.al. 1985; and Larsen-Freeman, 2001), or through three different ways: teaching grammar as a matter of entailing the formal explanation of grammar rules, of providing learners with practice in mastering common grammatical patterns through a process of analogy rather than explanation, and of giving students the opportunity to use English in

a variety of realistic situations or (1) from rules, (2) from examples, and (3) through texts (Thornbury, 1999). When using texts, including a poem, teachers can use a situation to provide the context and, then, use a text (Harmer, 2001:159). Moreover, teachers should consider the grammatical structure to be presented, the level and the age of the students, the theme and the length of the poem and its appropriateness to the classroom objectives (Saricoban, 2000:4).

When presenting and explaining new grammatical structure (grammar), teachers may follow several guidelines or principles: (1) including both oral and written forms, and both form and meaning, (2) providing the learners with plenty of contextualized examples of the structures, and with visual materials to make them more understand, (3) using terminology for older or more-analytically-minded learners will be beneficial, (4) using language based on the situation and personal judgment, (5) striking the right balance between accuracy and simplicity in which the teacher should give an explanation that covers great majority of instances learners are likely to encounter and obvious exceptions should be noted, (6) having an observer, and (7) deciding whether to elicit a rule from the learners on the basis of examples (inductive) or teacher's giving the rule or providing the information himself/herself and inviting them to produce examples (deductive) based on its effectiveness (Ur, 2000: 82-83).

Two other basic principles for grammar teaching: (1) the E-Factor or efficiency, and and (2) the A-Factor or appropriacy of any classroom activity (Thornburry, 1999: 25-27). Efficiency includes economy, ease and efficacy. The A-Factor or appropriacy includes learners' needs, interests, attitudes and expectation. Economy is related to time efficiency. Ease is related to how easily an activity is set up. Efficacy is related to provision of the optimal condition of learning to make students pay attention (by excluding from the focus of the learner's attention any distracting or irrelevant details), understand (by considering amount and quality of contextual information, explanation, and checking), and have motivation (by choosing tasks and materials based on the students' needs). Meanwhile, appropriacy is related to whether a classroom activity is appropriate with the age of the learners, their level, the size of the group, the constitution of the group, e.g. monolingual or multilingual, their needs, their interests, the availability of materials and resources, their previous learning experience, any cultural factors that might affect attitudes, e.g. their perception of the role and status of the teacher, and the educational context.

There are a number of micro-strategies that would help students learn grammar, which can be classified into cognitive strategies (modeling sentences, utilizing rules and also examples, consulting a dictionary, analyzing form and meaning, revising grammar points, and coping with variations in sentence structure), and self-monitoring strategies (students recognizing own errors, critiquing/receiving advice from teachers/peers, accepting teachers' feedback, learning to be reflective, students setting their own grammar goals, and seeing grammar as an active process) (Bade, 2008:179).

Then how to teach grammar through poetry? Upendran (2001) proposes the procedure of teaching grammar by using musical poetry (song). The procedures are as follows:

Students are provided with incomplete poem, in which each line contains a blank. They are asked to guess the appropriate words or phrase in the blank.

Students are asked to fill in the blanks as the teacher reads the poem. In this phase, the teacher reads the poem twice or three times. Then, the answers are checked together in group.

Students are asked to volunteer the information. Each of the blanks is taken up one by one and every student in the group is asked what word he or she has used in a particular blank (based on what grammar point taught). The different answers provided by the students are put up on the whiteboard. As all answers are being accepted, students will enthusiastically reveal what they have put down.

Students are asked the meaning of the words (the grammar point taught). The meaning is discussed individually and when a student provides a definition which everyone agrees on, it is put up on the whiteboard. Then the students are asked to use the word in a sentence.

Students are provided with contextual clues. When students are unable to define the word, there is no attempt to provide them with one. Instead, the word is used in a context and all students are expected to guess the meaning.

Students are asked to study the poem again. When the meanings of all the words put in the blanks have been figured out, the students are then asked to study the poem again and determine which word is demanded by the context. If, for example, we teach the phrasal verb "calls out" after agreeing on its meaning, the students are asked to provide cogent arguments why it can't be any of the other phrasal verbs. In this way, they not only remember the meaning of the phrasal verb but also where and how it should be used.

C. Data Analysis and Discussion

The data analysis was done based on the collected data from the following activities using poetry-based techniques as the revision of those proposed by Upendran (2001). The teaching steps that were implemented can be seen below:

The students are provided with a poem containing grammar points to be learned (for the first meeting). In this stage, the teacher asks one or two students to read a teacher-made poetry (the whole poetry) voluntarily. In case, there is no one willing to do so, the teacher will choose by himself/herself. Then, individual students will be asked to recite the poetry in turn sentence by sentence until all of the students get the chance to recite the poem. These activities are aimed at focusing students attention, enlarging student's vocabulary, improving students' pronunciation, increasing students' participation, and introducing (and reviewing) grammar points, and arousing their interest and motivation. For the next meetings, the students are provided with a newly teacher-made poem containing previously learned grammar points and those to be learned on that day's meeting.

The students are, then, given a model on how to recite the poetry by their English grammar teacher. The teacher does it two times. The purposes are indirectly correct students' mistakes of pronunciation and improve their listening skills.

The teacher, then, gives the students an opportunity to understand the content of the poem by reading it silently. The purpose of it is to improve their reading comprehension.

Then teacher asks the students to read and translate the poem orally, individually, and voluntarily. In case the students get difficulties, the teacher will guide them. This activity will improve the students' pronunciation ability, their reading, and translating ability).

The teacher highlights the (previously learned) grammar points contained in the poetry (for review) by underlining them to focus the students' attention on the new grammar points for that day's instruction. In other words, the teacher tries to guide the students to understand the previously learned and the new grammar points by underlining several words and, then, asking some questions to help the students to understand. These activities are aimed at making the students master the last and the new grammar points.

Next, the teacher divides the students into a group of four or of five in which one of the members of the group should be the one who has good understanding of previously learned materials. The group will be changed over time. The teacher, then, asks them to fill in the blanks of the teacher made-poem they have just read or to do a cloze-procedure exercise based on the blank poem. In this step, they will share ideas and discuss the possible words to be filled into the blank poem. Another alternative or possible activity is that the students can be ask to compose their own poem based on that day's grammar points. The students' poem should be computerized for the purpose of correction either by the students or by the teacher. Through this activity, the students are expected to be able to improve their grammar mastery, their speaking ability, their creativity, their attitudes toward grammar, their writing ability, their vocabulary, and their cooperation.

The teacher asks one (or two representatives) to recite the new poem they have just composed in front of the class and asks other students to pay attention, understand, and criticize the recited poem, especially related to the grammar points. This activities will improve the students' listening comprehension, their pronunciation, their speaking ability, their grammar mastery, their critical thinking, their openness, their self-confidence, and their reading aloud.

The teacher shows all class the newly constructed poem by the small groups of students using in-focus. In case the lamp is out, one of the poetry composers may be asked to write her/his group newly composed poem on the board. Then together with the students, the teacher gives feedback to the poem. These activities may improve the students' writing ability, their critical thinking, and the whole class grammar mastery.

If there is enough time, the teacher can continue with the next activity, namely asking individual students to orally fill in the previously used blank poem in turn. Then, the teacher asks one or two students to sum up the content of the newly constructed poem. If it is not possible, the individual students may construct a new poem using grammar points they have learned at home and recite it in the next meeting. These activities will improve the students' attitudes, their pronunciation, their bravery, their creativity, their self-confidence, and their grammar mastery.

Based on the steps of poetry-based techniques of grammar teaching implemented for six meetings, the data of the research were collected through observation, and interview techniques (to collect qualitative data), and through questionnaire technique (to collect quantitative data).

The observation was done during grammar teaching-learning process. This was conducted for six meetings. Observation technique was applied to collect the data about the students' enthusiasm during English grammar teaching-learning process using poetry-based techniques. Based on the observation, it was found that the students' motivation to learn English grammar was surprisingly very high and improved if compared with that of using previous techniques (from rules). All of the students attentively paid attention to the poetry presentation, poetry recitation, and poetry construction.

Based on the data collected through interview technique which was conducted after English grammar teaching-learning process using poetry-based techniques, similar information was also found out. The students enthusiastically stated that they enjoyed learning grammar using poetry.

To convince herself about the surprisingly positive results of the qualitative data, the researcher also distributed a questionnaire comprising several closed ended questions (questions 1, 2, 3, 5,6,7,8,9,10,11, 12, and 13) and open-ended questions question 4 and 14. The closed ended questions were used to find out the students' perception about their capability in English grammar (question 1), their level of interest in learning English grammar (question 2), their desire to improve English grammar ability (question 3), their level of interest in learning English grammar using poetry-based techniques, the positive effect of poetry-based techniques on their ways in learning English grammar (question 6), on their vocabulary mastery (question 7), on their listening ability (question 8), on their speaking ability (question 10), on their reading ability (question 11), on their writing ability (question 12), on their translating ability (question 13), and on other sides of the students.

In line with the previous collected data, the data collected from the questionnaire also show the same tendency. By comparing the students' answer on question 2 and question 4, it was found that the students' level of motivation in learning English grammar was greatly different between that of taught through the previous techniques (from rules & examples) and that of through poetry-based techniques. The increase is, namely 18% from average 4.12to average 4.21 of 5. Their desire to improve English grammar ability was 100%. It means they have high motivation to improve their capability of English grammar. Moreover, the data also showed that 92.86% of the students felt the positive effect of using poetry on their ways of learning English Grammar.

Based on the data from the questionnaire, there are some other positive effects of the use of the poetry-based techniques on interest, their ways in learning English grammar, their vocabulary mastery, their listening ability, their speaking ability, their reading ability, their writing ability, their translating ability, and on other sides of the students.

The students' perception about their capability in English grammar was various, in which 29 (29,29%) students perceived their grammar capability was good, 59 (59.6%) students perceived their grammar capability as moderate, 8 (8.1%) students perceived their grammar capability as very poor, 2 (2.02%) students perceived their grammar capability as very poor student, 1 (1.01%) student did not answer. Their level of interest in learning English grammar using poetry-based techniques has positive effect on their ways in learning English grammar (92.86%). Furthermore, the use of poetry-based techniques also has effect on the students' their vocabulary mastery (97.99%), on their pronunciation ability (98.98%), on their listening ability (88.78%), on their speaking ability (95.92%), on their reading ability (question 93.88%), on their writing ability (97.99%), on their translating ability (97.99%), and on other sides of the students.

The high increase in students' motivation may derive from the following reasons. First, the tasks used to teach grammar was based on the students' need. Why is it said so? Teaching grammar through poetry-based techniques, the teacher assigned the students to do several tasks like reciting poems, listening to poem recitation, translating the poem line-by-line individually, composing a new poem either in unison or individually, and criticizing other groups' poems. Second, the poems contain materials that were also in line with their need. Third, to introduce new grammar points, the researcher teacher used poems that invited students' curiosity, creativity, and high-order thinking skills. These all contributed to motivation to learn (APA Task Force on Psychology in Education in McInerney & McInerney, 1998: 172). The titles of the poems that the researcher has already used to teach English grammar for teaching *Gerund and Infinitives* and *Adjective clause* include: *How Green I Was, A Rendezvous, Do you Miss Me?, I Need You Badly, Know Your Idol, and Stop Your Jealousy*. All of the poems which were composed by the researcher herself seem to be interesting, and meet their needs and expectation. Besides, the relaxed teaching-learning process of English grammar seems to change their attitude toward grammar learning. Besides, in the teaching-learning process of English grammar through poetry-based techniques, they are provided with optimal condition of learning to make the students pay attention. All of the students use their optimum effort to finish the assigned tasks based on the teacher's blank-poem. All the activities are in line with the basic principles that Thornbury (1999: 25-27) suggests: (1) the E-Factor or efficiency, and and (2) the A-Factor or appropriacy of any classroom activity. Efficiency includes economy, ease and efficacy. The A-Factor or appropriacy includes learners' needs, interests, attitudes and expectation. Economy is related to time efficiency. Ease is related to how easily an activity is set up. Efficacy is related to provision of the optimal condition of learning to make students pay attention (by excluding from the focus of the learner's attention any distracting or irrelevant details), understand (by considering amount and quality of contextual information, explanation, and checking) and have motivation (by choosing tasks and materials based on the students' needs). Meanwhile, appropriacy is related to whether a classroom activity is appropriate with the age of the learners, their level, the size of the group, the constitution of the group, e.g. monolingual or multilingual, their needs, their interests, the availability of materials and resources, their previous learning experience, any cultural factors that might affect attitudes, e.g. their perception of the role and status of the teacher, and the educational context.

Thornburry (1999) mentions three ways to teach grammar: from rules, from examples and through texts. In this case, a poem. According to Saricoban (2000:4), in the selection of a poem, the teacher should first consider the grammatical structure to be presented, then the level and the age of the students, next the theme and the length of the poem and its appropriateness to the classroom objectives.

D. Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the previous data, it can be concluded that the use of poetry to teach grammar has already increased not only students' motivation to learn English grammar but also their grammar ability. The more surprising is that the positive impacts of using poetry to teach grammar are tremendous since most of the students claim that their English vocabulary, their pronunciation ability, their listening ability, their speaking ability, their reading ability, their writing ability, their interest, their attitude towards learning grammar become much more positive, their creativity increases, their cooperation is doing group work is improved, and their logical thinking is also improved.

Considering many positive effects that may be got from teaching English grammar, it is strongly suggested that English teachers use poetry-based techniques to teach grammar. The use of these kinds of techniques can increase not only students' motivation to learn grammar but also their grammar mastery. Moreover, it is suggested that English teachers use poetry to teach English language components and skills.

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