GRAMMAR CONCIOUSNESS RAISING: REVISITED

Akhyar Burhan
University of Sriwijaya
E-mail : akhyarburhan@yahoo.com

Abstract

That grammar is one of the language aspects goes without saying. The need of a second language learner for some explicit or implicit knowledge of the target language has recently been a controversial issue in the foreign language education. Some contend that it is very necessary that grammatical structures be taught overtly while others claim that knowledge of the target language grammar will take care of itself as the learners are exposed to adequate comprehensible input. These different attitudes towards the means by which grammatical competence is attained will in turn lead to different classroom teaching techniques. As Ramani (1987: 117) points out, "A teacher's changed theory will lead to changes in practice. In other words, perceptual change must precede procedural change." This paper is devoted to the discussion on theoretical issues on the teaching of grammar or the acquisition of grammar in a broader sense in the new paradigm of language pedagogy.

Keywords : Grammar consciousness, language

Grammar Consciousness Raising

Consciousness Raising (CR) as defined by Rutherford and Smith (eds.) (1988:3) is intended to embrace a continuum ranging from intensive promotion of conscious awareness through pedagogical role articulation on the one hand, to mere exposure of the learner to specific grammatical phenomena on the other. For all but the past century and a half of the 2,500 years of language teaching, the teaching of grammar has been deemed of necessary component of any language teaching program (Rutherford in Rutherford and Smith (eds.), 1988:15). The long period of emphasis on grammar teaching supports the awakening of the importance of raising the learners' consciousness of grammar.

In agreement with the view above, Peck (1988:74) draws our attention to the notion that since the ultimate aim of foreign language teaching and learning is the communication of massages, the sender and the receiver must share the organizational principles, namely the grammatical rules on which the massages are based. If this is not the case, the sender's attempts at the communication will be either meaningless hieroglyphics or sound without intelligibility. Advocates of CR of grammar contend that in order for the learner to have control over his language use, he must have the correct knowledge of language system. A moderate view is exhibited by Marton (1988:127) in his statement that pedagogical intervention should be seen not as going counter to the natural learning process and changing it radically but rather as affecting it positively by intensifying it and making it more efficient. Rutherford and Smith (eds.) (1988:4) puts forward similar contention as follows,

> Instructional strategies which draw the attention of the learners to specifically structural regularities of the language, as distinct from the massage content, will under certain specified condition significantly increase the rate of the acquisition over and above the rate expected from learners acquiring that language under natural circumstances where attention to from may be minimal and sporadic.

It was Eric W. Hawkins who pioneered the concept of language awareness and was considered as the 'Father of language awareness'. In the seventies, language awareness started out as a movement

which was British in origin and now it has been widespread throughout the globe. The idea behind this movement is to abridge two languages as products of two different cultures (L1 and L2). Hawkins believed that students should have an understanding of their own language before tackling a second one. This would mean knowledge of the structure of their language and also an understanding of the role language plays in culture and society. Hawkins (1999) stated that language awareness was applied primarily by the modern linguists as a new 'bridging' element in the UK schools to solve several failures that were being faced by schools in United Kingdom, such as illiteracy in English, failure to learn foreign languages, and divisive prejudices. Hawkins (1974, as cited in Hawkins, 1999: 124) then proposed a new subject "**language**", to be taught as a 'bridging subject', linking English and the foreign languages in the curriculum.

In 'Ten questions about language awareness', Bolitho et al. (2003: 251-252) mention that language awareness, which is a pedagogic approach aiming to assist learners to obtain insight on how languages work, is a mental attribute that develops through paying motivated attention to language in use, which contributes in enabling language learners to gradually gain insights into how languages works. Hawkins (1984, cited in Bolitho *et al.*, 2003) points out that language awareness involves challenging learners to ask questions about language, encouraging learners to collect their own data from the world outside academic setting, and helping leaners to develop a growing insight into the way language works in order to convey meaning. The key element of language awareness approach is that learners discover language for themselves. Furthermore, Tomlinson (1994, as cited in Bolitho *et al.*, 2003) sees language awareness as something 'dynamic and intuitive', which is gradually developed internally by the learners, whereas Bolitho and Tomlinson (1995, cited in Bolitho et al, 2003) view language awareness as helping to develop a healthy spirit of inquiry and set the classroom as a place where 'the only views of language that matter are the ones that both teachers and learners have established in their heads. Having viewed several perspectives on language awareness, we can draw a conclusion that language awareness should be implemented in academic setting because it fosters bilingualism which can raise other form of intelligences, such as metacognitive and metalinguistic capacities. It also fosters independent learning because it motivates the learners to discover how languages work and is used to either construct or deliver meanings.

In regard to Indonesian context, language awareness has been promoted through International standard school, where bilingualism is applied (Bahasa Indonesia and English). In fact, the use of Bahasa Indonesia as a national and official language and English as a foreign language, have been regulated in the ACT of the Republic of Indonesia No 24, 2009, from chapter 25 through chapter 45. This ACT serves as a foundation to raise language awareness where L1 and L2 are employed interchangeably in school setting. However, it should also be noted that we just might have problems similar of those faced by the students in the United Kingdom which triggered the language awareness movement in the first place; illiteracy in native tongue (Bahasa Indonesia) and the failure to learn foreign language (English). Consider that Bahasa Indonesia is acquired, not learned, and it seems that we take for granted that we are capable of using it properly. On the other hand, English as a foreign language is learned, not acquired. Yet, too many times we feel that we are not capable enough as to convey our thought to a native speaker or construct meanings when a native speaker of English speaks. Thus language awareness is needed as to facilitate the gap between L1 acquisition and L2 learning, so that L1 is not only acquired but also learned, and L2 is not only learned but also acquired. The other underlying notion is that by having expected level of knowledge of how both languages work, we strongly assume that learners better understand the content/material.

The conscious versus unconscious knowledge can be depicted as two extreme poles of a continuum. The categories are parallel with analyzed and automatic dimensions of language proficiency as introduced by Bialystok in Rutherford and Smith (eds.) (1988:37). Language proficiency can be qualitatively determined on the points along the automatic dimensions. The analyzed knowledge of language is virtually the awareness of the language structure. Put it another way, it is marked with the hold of control over that knowledge, thus, it is accessible for retrieval. The lack of the control indicates the nonanalyzed. If a structural regularity of a language is known as analyzed knowledge, then the learner may use that structure in new contexts, and transform that structure for other rhetorical purposes. If an aspect of the language is nonanlyzed, it is understood more intuitively and has limited application in new contexts or new purposes.

The nonautomatic versus automatic dimension refers to the procedures for using the knowledge (information) which differentiates relative access to it in terms of fluent or nonfluent performance. The following figure illustrates graphically the two dimensions of language proficiency as adopted from Bialystok's in Rutherford and Smith (eds.) (1988:37).

Automatic

Fluent speaker	Highly skilled, literate
Native speaker in ordinary	Specialized uses of language e.g. rhetorical

Non-analyzed ———————————————————————— **analyzed**

L2 learners at early Stages	L2 formal learners
Children learning L1	

Non-automatic

As one of devout advocates of CR notwithstanding, Smith assures us that language CR is not to be identified as the pedantic giving and testing of rules and list of vocabulary items, and the learners are required to learn by rote and produce rules and lists of words. Rather, the conveying of a rule or any other kind of information about the language can be more or it can be less reduced to the familiar metalinguistic prescriptions of traditional grammar (Smith in Rutherford and Smith, the eds., 1988:53). It must be noted that all of the efforts made are geared to the discovery of regularities in the target language and that the discovery is guided by the teacher.

In relation to the teaching and learning process, the grammatical features can vary in the degree of elaboration with which they are presented, as well as degree of explicitness or intensity in the way attention is drawn to the grammatical structures.

To conclude, I consider it worth keeping in mind the general concept of CR as Rutherford in Rutherford and Smith (eds.) (1988:107) points out, "by consciousness raising we mean the deliberate attempt to draw the learner's attention specifically to the formal properties of the target language." Also, the teaching of grammar has been considered as the main component of the language teaching

This paper has been presented at Sriwijaya University Learning and Education-International Conference 2014. Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University, Palembang, May 16—18, 2014.

B47-423

for two and a half millennia. The advancement of language teaching methods that accord little or no importance to the explicit teaching of grammar is about a hundred years old.

a Shift to the Importance of Grammatical Focus

Like a pendulum swing, the treatment of grammar especially in foreign or second language classroom has shifted from the emphasis on grammatical focus to the rejection to it. Rutherford and Smith (eds.) (1988:9) attribute the rejection to among others the formal excesses of nineteenth-century grammar-translation methodology, which towards the end of that century had finally lost all relationship to the realities of language use. Marton (1988:59) stigmatizes such decontextualized teaching of grammar, "… the presentation of language mostly in paradigm form and in isolated, decotextualized sentences is not a very effective strategy of language teaching …"

Significant contribution to the shift of view has been made by the Natural Methods and the Direct Method, which approach language teaching on the basis of how children learn their mother tongue. Language learning was thus starting to be regarded as a form of habit formation rather than just the internalization of sets of abstractions. The Natural Method recognized no distinction between the way in which first and second languages are learned. The Direct Method provides the learner with the target language during the classroom activities. In this way, so it is claimed, the learners will pick up the language from the model exposed to them. In a more recent development of language acquisition theory, the input as long as it is comprehensible is the one way of stimulating the mental organ devoted to language, or termed as language Acquisition Device (LAD) (Krashen, 1989:25). However, Krashen (1989:30) concedes that some rules can be deliberately taught, but he further states that this knowledge can be used as a supplement to acquire competence.

Krashen (1989:59) posits that we acquire language in only one way, namely when we understood messages in that language when we receive comprehensible input. Memorizing word, studying grammar, and doing drills contribute little to language competence in the adult and even less in the child, Krashen further argues. The learners acquire a new rule by understanding messages that contain the rule. Comprehension is obtained with the aid of extralinguistic context, or knowledge of the world, and the learners' previous linguistic competence. To help make input comprehensible, the use of pictures and realia is highly recommended.

Meaningful Grammar Practice

This section presents the rationale or theory which underlies the practice. The language practice or exercise, or it has recently been popular with the term "task" consists of a selected sentence or sentences taken from textbooks. The selected excerpt is sufficiently long to generate a considerable number of questions, the interrelated-separated sentences making up four to ten items. The use of textbooks as sources of material is to assure that the language is authentic, which most of the learners likely to read. The ability to read is aspired by most language teaching programs including the English syllabus.

With respect to the utilization of authentic materials and the presentation of the language rules in contexts have been touched upon by some language teaching practitioners and theorists. Huda (1995: 30) emphasizes that learning would be meaningful if the students learn expressions at the discourse level as opposed to words in isolation. In line with this, Marton (1988: 59) gives him support as stated below,

This paper has been presented at Sriwijaya University Learning and Education-International Conference 2014. Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University, Palembang, May 16—18, 2014.

B47-424

The use of texts presents languages as expressing various communicative functions; it presents its syntax and morphology in relation and not in abstract rules and paradigmatic tables; it also presents its vocabulary not in isolated items but in phrases and collocations confirming to the language-specific conventions of lexical concurrence.

Although on some occasions words alone are not enough to indicate meaning because of the high degree of contextual determinacy, on most occasions more precision is needed to identify the contextual features which are related to the conceptual meanings of the words, and this is where grammar comes in. (Widdowson in Rutherford and Smith, the eds., 1998: 149) Widdowson elaborates this concept with an illustration which is repeated here. The words **kill**, **lion**, and **hunter** have conceptual meanings respectively. However, the three words will constitute different contextual meanings as shown by these sentences:

a. The hunter killed the lion.
b. The hunter was killed by the lion.

The context will clarify who or what the killer or the killed is.

An authentic excerpt or text contains a number of contextual meanings, indicated by the relations such as:

a) the doer and the receiver relation,
b) the action and the agent relation,
c) the action and the recipient relation,
d) the modifier and the modified relation,
e) the spatial and temporal relations, etc.

It is these relations which are transformed into the incomplete sentences which the students have to complete on the basis of the ideas in the selected texts that precede these sentences.

Although this grammar practice draws the learners' attention primarily to the content contained in the selection and avoids the discussion on formal grammar full of metalinguistic terms, the language forms and rules are, when necessary, to be talked about and the use of metalanguage is tolerated. Again, to emphasize, the task is applied rather theoretically in nature, that is the students are guided to comprehend the text.

Since the students are required to restate the ideas contained in the text by filling in the blanks in the questions or task items that follow the model text, they can break up and then piece together the ideas and thus this practice is a sort of a guided, analytic-syntactic paraphrasing activity, and this approach is expected to contribute to comprehension. Leech, Margaret Deuchar, and Robert Hogenraad (1985: 23) similarly claim, "Analysis and synthesis are two aspects of the same process of understanding."

CONCLUSION

Some recent ideas about teaching of language, be it a foreign or second language and first language, stand in contrast to the view which has been adopted for a considerably long period of time. The Natural Method, the Direct Method, the Audiolinguism, and the Input Hypothesis treat the teaching of grammar in a different way from the old practice. These relatively new trends deemphasize the grammar teaching, especially the formal and paradigmatic styles with separate lexical items and

This paper has been presented at Sriwijaya University Learning and Education-International Conference 2014. Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University, Palembang, May 16—18, 2014.

B47-425

prescriptive rules full of separated, unnatural sentences as the examples. More than that, the teaching of grammar is sometimes considered as inhibiting language acquisition since it may discourage the language learners. Pedantic giving and testing of metalinguistic rules can serve as a mental block for the language input to be taken as the intake. This shift of focus is by some language-teaching theorists attributed to the excesses of grammar translation methodology.

However, the failures of these new trends in language especially second language classroom application have swung back the pendulum to the need for grammatical consciousness raising advocated by a few applied linguists, notably by William Rutherford and Michael Sharwood Smith. No less than Widdowson readdresses the important roles of grammar knowledge as repeated here,

> Teaching which gives primacy to form and uses of words simply as a means of exemplification actually denies the nature of grammar as a construct for the mediation of meaning. I would suggest that more natural and more effective approach would be to reverse this traditional pedagogic dependency, begin with words, and show how they need to be grammatically modified to be communicatively effective (Widdowson in Rutherford and Smith, the eds. 1988: 154)

In this chapter, I would like to share my experience in applying a language teaching and learning activity which I name meaningful grammar practice. It involves the use of authentic materials quoted from textbooks and get the students engaged in identifying contextual meanings or relations of conceptual meanings by finding out the grammatical clues. The students are encouraged to analyze and re-synthesize the relational features. Or, this language learning tasks can be viewed as a guided paraphrasing exercise. The approach adopted with this learning technique is eclectic in that it incorporates the positive points from the two different grammar teaching practices; it is contextualized but discussion on grammatical rules is tolerated only when necessary.

I found the students' reactions and comments supporting this language learning procedure. Any way, I do not claim that this technique will always be effective. I am, for one, in agreement with the views proposed by some theorists and language education caretakers. Peck (1988:203) contends, "The most important and possibly reassuring thing to state is that no one, single, correct way to teach a foreign language. What has been written by Rivers and Temperly (1978: vii) seems still very relevant with our present situation as can be read in the following.

> Since the nature of language and its complex operation is still a matter of controversy and since the psychologists have still much to learn about how language is acquired—the native language as well as a second or third language—we, language teachers, have an open field. We are free to experiment and innovate.

It is to be hoped that small-scale experiments conducted in the classroom may lead to improvements in teaching methods and consequent improvements in students' learning.

REFERENCES

Balitho, *et al*. (2003). Ten Questions About Language Awareness. *ELT Journal*. 57(3): 251--259.
Hakins, E.W.(1999). Foreign Language Study And Language Awareness. *Language Awareness*. (8): 124--142.
Huda, Nuril.(1995). Pendekatan Kebermaknaan in The 1994 English Syllabus. *English*

Language Educational Journal. Malang: Institute of Teacher Training and Education..

Krashen, Stephen D.(1989). *Language Acquisition and Language education.* New York: Prentice Hall International.

Leech, G., Margaret D., & Robert H.(1985). *English Grammar for Today: A New Introduction.* Hound mills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS and London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd.

Marton, Waldemar.(1988). *Methods in English Language Teaching: Framework and Options.* N.Y: Prentice Hall.

Peck, Antony J.(1988). *Language Teachers at Work: a Description of Methods.* New York, N.Y: Prentice Hall.

Ramani, Esther.(1987). *The Role of Classroom Interaction in the Integration of the Theory and Practice in Bikram K. Des (Eds.). Communication and Learning in The Classroom Community.* Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.

Rutherford, William & Michael Sharwood Smith.(1988). *Grammar and Second language Teaching: A Book of Readings.* Boston, Massachusetts: Henle and Henle Publishers.

This paper has been presented at Sriwijaya University Learning and Education-International Conference 2014. Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sriwijaya University, Palembang, May 16—18, 2014.

B47-427