



FRIENDLY ENGLISH GRAMMAR TEACHING FOR YOUNG LEARNERS

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Abstract

Learning a new language is a complex thing for children. Current belief that children are the best recipients for new knowledge can even give fewer solutions if the way of teaching is not appropriate with their age. Teaching English for young learners plays its role to make it straight on the right way of teaching English which is friendly for children. There is one part of some crucial English materials that must commonly attract the teacher's attention like "is it right to teach grammar to children?" or "how to tell them to use grammar in correct way?". English teachers have their own teaching style but in this matter, it cannot be ignored that every materials delivered, every approach applied, and every technique done, they should be child-friendly. By considering the characteristics of children, English Education Department students of Muria Kudus University are asked to create games to teach grammar for young learners in friendly ways. This is a descriptive research which compiles the data of friendly English grammar teaching for young learners from the English Education Department students as the data source. The result of the research is described based on the three ways of teaching grammar for young learners: 1) Noticing; 2) Structuring; and 3) Proceduralizing. In conclusion, teachers naturally have their thought of making everything fun in the classroom, especially in early grades. Teaching grammar can be still a fun activity if it is considered in some friendly ways.

Keywords: English grammar, teaching, young learners

INTRODUCTION

Learning a language is something that should be done naturally. Children learn to use their first language to communicate with people around them. They do not need any stationery to learn the language. But when they learn other or foreign language, they have such a kind of difficulty like: many things needed as learning media. This means that the process of learning a particular language should be as natural as possible to achieve the purpose: to communicate receptively. As well as adults, children even spend more than 45% of communication to listen (Garber, 2008:9). This can be a starting consideration for teachers that the beginning activities should make the children listen and become interested in the English. Naturally, they will try to recognize the meaning and also the pattern. In recognizing the pattern, there will be an automatic process of grammar realization related to form and meaning of some particular expressions stated by the teacher. Children's language learning stages consist the things in which they should experience based on their psychological development. Playful stage is one of the characteristics of their life activities that cannot be ignored, especially in foreign language learning.

English is one of foreign languages which become a compulsory subject in almost all school levels in Indonesia. It has been broadly used by students since the sophisticated era of technologies exists in this country. Many English teachers do their role of teaching English to Indonesian students. However, the quality of the teaching and learning process still needs to be improved due to reach the maximum result of English mastery for the students. Teaching English for young learners become the very first step to consider the next step of the students' mastery. Most opinions stated that Indonesian students still have difficulties of applying correct grammar in their English utterance. One of the causes is students do not learn the grammar or structure naturally. They have a habit of learning grammar through some written formulas which is actually confusing. People learn their first language without any formula and they can communicate and apply the grammar very well. This kind of tactic should be used in teaching foreign language especially grammar.

Current issues about teaching English for children say that it is wrong to teach grammar for Elementary school students. It is wrongly believed. Grammar is a very important thing to be told in the lower grades but the way of teaching should be modified into fun activities, no formulas but contextual and integrated with other skills. This issue should be socialized earlier to the ones who become the candidate-teachers: the students of English Education Department.

The students of English Education Department of Muria Kudus University get both theories and practice how to teach young learners within the purpose of improving the quality of English teachers including the way of teaching. Those candidate-teachers must have fresh and brilliant and unexpected ideas if they are asked to make something new and creative. Here they are asked to contribute their ideas of making some sets of activities which become the creative ways of teaching grammar to young learners. Their ideas will be compiled based on the basics: 1) Noticing; 2) Structuring; and 3) Proceduralizing. Hopefully this will give contribution to the ideas of teaching grammar to young learners in appropriate ways.

The research problem is stated as how are the students' ideas of teaching grammar to young learners by creating some sets of activities? After stating such a problem, an objective of the research is also set to find out the descriptions of the students' ideas of teaching grammar to young learners. Theoretically, it is expected to add some resources about teaching English to young learners and practically, it is aimed to be applied by English teachers in primary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous theories are invented to improve the innovation of how to teach grammar to young learners. The basic things that are mostly discussed are the types of grammar that should be taught to young learners, whether grammar should be taught explicitly or not, and the appropriate activities that can be applied by the teachers. There are two aspects of grammar that teachers should pay attention: 1) the rules of forming words; 2) the way of forming the words into meaningful sentence. Those two aspects are necessary to be the purpose of teaching grammar, but again, teachers should consider how children learn since they are in their golden age that can receive anything new easily.

Teaching Young Learners

The basic considerations of how children learn start from their characteristics: play, sing, and have fun. Those components can be fulfilled as the starting point to arrange fun classroom

activities. Grammar explanation is the thing which is “prohibited” in teaching English for young learners. This technique can lead the students to learn the abstract thing about language and the worst is they will get bored easily. Children improve their listening comprehension and pronunciation very well when they start to learn with some accuracy of grammar structures (Sekelj and Rigo, 2011: 190). Metalinguistic information like abstract concepts and theories are hard to understand by children. If teachers do that, it will be useless because children interpret meaning without knowing the structure of the language. It runs naturally as they learn their first language. It is commonly considered as an indirect learning, the better way of learning for children instead a direct learning. Teachers should make their young students to understand the materials unconsciously without explaining them directly.

Materials especially grammar are taught in simple ways and structure based on the students’ level which is usually represented by their groups of age. Complex grammar is less taught to the younger students, especially form-focused instruction. The only one thing that is necessary to focus on is the students can understand the meaning of what the teacher says. It gives the students an automatic way of forming their habits of using correct grammar without telling them the word class.

Classroom activities should be full of praises and compliment because young learners really need them to keep them motivated. It is a kind of something to prevent them from giving up when they are in the process of learning. Children also have an awesome ability of using particular language correctly without knowing the exact meaning. They are like parrots, they copy and retell the thing told to them. After they can speak with appropriate form of sentence, the teacher can lead them to the meaning of the sentence that they copy. It will be more effective than telling them word by word because language is a set of contexts. They are integrated and words cannot be separated to form the whole meaning.

Children are ready to get new information very well if they can assimilate with the thing presented to them (Brumfit, Moon, and Tongue, 1995: 2). Clear and simple instructions are also needed to be managed by teachers who teach young learners. They will not get the point of the thing that they should do if the instruction is quite long and complicated. The instruction will be better if it is told by example: moving and practicing. Abstract instruction is not appropriate for young learners. They are still attracted to moves because children learn through their eyes, hands, ears, and their senses. The best teaching technique should consist of sets of activities which can activate their five senses to make it real. Kinesthetic is the most appropriate teaching and learning technique for young learners, even the material is about grammar focus.

Children can focus based on the level of their age, the younger the students, the shorter they focus on a thing. It can be said that children can easily be bored. This is why teachers need variety in arranging the teaching and learning activities. Visual aids will bring so many benefits in making the young learners understand well about the pattern (Halliwell, 1994). One more thing that should be in teachers’ mind is do not expect questions from students related to the materials, because most of them will pretend that they understand the materials although they do not. The thing that the teacher can do is checking their understanding by reviewing the activities which have been done by the class.

Grammar Learning for Young Learners

There are three focuses of understanding a grammar of a language especially English: on meaning, on use, or on form (Dendrinos, 2015: 10). They still become a problem to most of teachers who teach young learners. Those three focuses are the leading points to consider the appropriate teaching technique of grammar indirect learning for young learners. Many techniques are invented and become inspirations for teachers in teaching English for young learners. Plural characteristics and levels of motivation are the essential things to be considered. A teacher cannot exactly copy the other teacher's teaching technique because there are many factors that can be the considerations of creating the sets of activities. Assumptions might be needed to guide the teacher learn the students' characteristics. Plural characteristics of children can lead their varying learning styles. The communication arranged should be meaningful and less abstract instruction. Grammar cannot be separately integrated with this meaningful communication. The important grammar purpose is to make a meaningful communication. When the students communicate meaningfully, it means that they already use correct and appropriate grammar. The performance of forming children's good communication can include the combinations of their social skill, skill of thinking critically, physical activities, and creativity. This valuable combination can make a complete set of learning activities in which the purpose is to make the students "busy" of doing their "games" however they are learning something out of their consciousness.

There are some patterns of sequencing grammar learning activities that can be used by teachers to teach young learners: 1) noticing, 2) structuring, 3) proceduralizing. Noticing is the process in which the learners can be aware of new patterns and how the form and meaning are connected. In this stage, teachers should not ask the students to produce the sentence by themselves. In other words, this stage is aimed to give appropriate examples for the students and it demands a very good quality of the input language from the teacher. There are some indicators that show the activities of noticing can be successful. First, the teacher can show visual media to support the meaning from the sentence produced. Second, the pattern is shown in a kind of social context, not word by word. Third, to show the difference of the use in every pattern, always compare the previous pattern with the new one, so the student will be curious of learning the difference. Fourth, active participation is essentially needed in the every single activity set by the teacher. Fifth, the activities must be considered with the appropriateness of the age level of the learners. Last, the learning process can lead the activities into something that can manipulate language as well. There are many examples of applying the sequence of noticing activities, they are as follows: Modeling; drawing; using visual and texts; having dialogue with puppets; giving instructions, questions, and requests; exploring everyday situations; writing and circling, etc.

The next stage is structuring activities. It is intended to lead the learners to find their internal grammar recognition, not by universal pattern, but their own pattern so that they will recognize the use of different pattern. This stage requires more practice to control form and meaning. Therefore, the students need to get involved to recognize the change of the meaning when the pattern changes too. It will make them produce the language with correct and appropriate form and meaning. Another effective way is the students are given some options that require grammar adjustment to express meaning. The examples of structuring activities are as follows: interaction activities like questionnaires and surveys about food, hobbies, routines, etc; language games; drills; finding correct word order; songs with appropriate lyrics; action guessing activity.

The stage of proceduralization is the chance for the teacher to lead the students to the activities of using new patterns. Language production is necessary here. Intensive attention to grammar is very essential since the students have to make some effective communication, not only mentioning some words or sentence separately from integrated context. The examples of proceduralizing activities are as follows: writing captions in comic strips; telling a story based on visual media; role playing; asking the students to correct the error that is intentionally made by the teacher; finding and considering the ending of a story, etc.

METHOD

The design of the research is descriptive. The data are collected from the assignment of English Education Department in Muria Kudus University about their opinion of teaching grammar to young learners. After collecting the data with various individual opinions of games in teaching grammar to young learners, the analysis is done by sorting the ways of grammar teaching created by the students based on the theories stated: noticing, structuring, and proceduralizing. The purpose of analyzing the grammar teaching technique is to give further knowledge of which of the three ways is mostly used by the students as candidate-teachers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The sets of activities arranged by the students of English Education Department in Muria Kudus University are significantly different. But the idea of sequencing the activities of noticing, structuring, and proceduralizing are unintentionally done. The dominant stage used by the students is structuring activities with the total number 19 sets of activities. Noticing activities are chosen by 6 students and the last is proceduralizing which consists of 3 sets of activities.

The structuring activities are considered with different specific instructions: completing missing words in a sentence; guessing some words through questions; questions and answers about favorites; singing songs; and finding correct word order. The guessing games are chosen by 9 students. Guessing games can activate the students' brain to tell their idea and even a critical thinking so that they can brainstorm before they go to the materials that are necessary to understand. 4 students chose singing songs games to lead their students to recognize grammar patterns. 3 students consider completing missing words games to make the students draw their own pattern in their mind instead of learning abstract pattern in grammar materials. The last 2 students chose finding correct word order to check and activate the students' understanding about the appropriate patterns. The noticing activities are also considered with different details as follows: repeating using pictures; games using visuals; and leading questions. The last one is proceduralizing by checking error games and finding the ending of a story.

There are some factors that give effects to the students' consideration in setting the activities in teaching English for young learners in a fun way, especially in grammar teaching. In their mind, teaching grammar is all about telling the students the patterns of a sentence. That is why structuring activities unintentionally become the favorite one. In this stage, the teacher can really control and check the students' understanding about the materials that have been delivered. However, the materials are delivered by the teacher and learned unconsciously by the students. Grammar can be taught in fun ways without telling the students explicitly about the patterns.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The analysis that is presented in the discussion draws a conclusion of the research: the dominant stage used by the students of English Education Department of Muria Kudus University is structuring. There are 16 students consider this stage. 6 students consider noticing to teach grammar, and the last 3 students choose proceduralization as appoint of activating the grammar realization.

Numerous suggestions are addressed to English teachers who teach young learners. Every teacher has particular teaching style that cannot be exactly the same with the others. Modifying and applying are possible. But it is impossible for a teacher to imitate the same teaching style because every different input will produce different output as well. Getting creative, innovative, both inspired and inspiring are the real requirement of a good teacher.

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