

## DECLARATIVE AND PROCEDURAL KNOWLEDGE IN TEACHING GRAMMAR

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### Abstract

*When one has to teach a language, he should possess a view of what languages. One possibility is to view language as a skill. Therefore language learning is comparable to other types of cognitive skill acquisition. In this case, there is a need for us to understand the concept of declarative and procedural knowledge. This is similar to that of knowledge about and knowledge how or knowledge and control (Bialystok, in Johnson, 1994), competence and performance, and usage and use. The first of those terms refers to factual knowledge of a language such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation etc., and the latter to the actual use of the knowledge in real act of communication such as in speaking, reading, listening and writing. The problem is how these two knowledge can be developed. This paper is inspired by Keith Johnson whose Teaching Declarative and Procedural knowledge suggest that the strategy to develop the knowledge correspond to what is commonly called learning and acquisition.*

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**Keywords:** *declarative and procedural knowledge, learning, acquisition.*

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### **Introduction**

All of us, Indonesian, acquire our bahasa Indonesia through natural process without learning the grammar first. However, the fact that we can produce utterances we have not heard before shows that we have something generative in nature--it is the grammar which we learn subconsciously. Why can it be so? Rutherford (1987) states that one characteristic that is common to every *successful* language-learning experience is that learner is exposed one way or another to an adequate amount of the data of the language to be learned. In the context of Bahasa Indonesia we have abundant language input which enables us to make generalizations which form the corpus of our subconscious grammar. Yet, Rutherford continues, the circumstances in which we learn a new language, are often limited so that we only have access to considerably *less* than the necessary range of data for making appropriate generalizations. In the Indonesian setting, such data whether visual in the form of graphic symbol or audio in the form of sounds can only be

accessed in classrooms. This, I think, justifies the inclusion of grammar in the curriculum of many English department in Indonesia. Although grammar has been omitted, but it does not mean that grammar is not important.

Now with no grammar in curriculum, the question is how to present it to our students to make it a working knowledge. By *work* I mean a knowledge which facilitates them to communicate in English; be it orally as in speaking and automatically listening, or written as in reading and writing. Therefore it can be said that teachers agree that grammar is very important but not all of them agree with the way it should be taught. Some of them tend to teach it deductively through explicit explanation of rules and pattern. Others think that the best way is to present it with inductive approach which means that rules of combining words into meaningful phrases or sentences should come to the learners mind implicitly. Those who agree with implicit mode of presenting grammar may argue that using explicit method in teaching English will be burdensome to the students as they have to memorize a lot of grammar rule and pattern and he will use the acquisition of the mother tongue as an example of how people can acquire a language without explicit learning of the grammar. Those who support the explicit or deductive method in presenting grammar, in the Indonesian context, argue that the circumstance in which learners learn English is not the same as that someone has in acquiring his or her mother tongue and this circumstance has something to do with the exposure to English.

This paper will consider how to present the *knowledge about* grammar to the students and how to convert this into *knowledge how to* use that grammar, the first being what is termed *declarative knowledge* and the latter *procedural knowledge*. The two notions are similar to Chomsky's distinction between *competence* and *performance*, the first referring to the factual knowledge of a language (grammar) and the second to the actual ability of using language.

The concept of declarative and procedural knowledge is based on the view of language. In this concept language is viewed as a skill. Therefore language learning is comparable to other types of cognitive skill acquisition. This two terms are originally used by Anderson Neves and Anderson (Johnson, 1994) as a part of his explanation on how to teach geometry.

### **The problem**

With regard to learning, especially in the Indonesian context, we can probably agree that *knowledge about* is a useful first step to developing procedural knowledge *how to*. This means that knowledge about grammar for example should be made automatic in order to generate the communicative ability which needs the procedural knowledge. This will

also means that teaching grammar should not be for its own sake, the teaching or learning of grammar will be meaningful when it has a touch with real world, the communicative one. The discussion of this aspect is important because there is a wide assumption that teaching grammar is not useful, not communicative and therefore should be avoided. This may be true if the teaching of grammar only ends with the students' knowing the grammar or pattern with having them experience the use of the pattern for communicating things which are realistic. So the problem here is how to teach or present grammar that is communicative or meaningful by making the use of declarative and procedural concept.

#### **From declarative to procedural knowledge**

Johnson (1994) says that there are two paths that a teacher can employ to present these two types of knowledge to learners. But because we are discussing the teaching of grammar, the focus is on the first path or strategy. This strategy is moving from declarative to procedural knowledge. This strategy, he says, goes through three steps: initial forming of declarative knowledge, maintaining declarative knowledge, and proceduralising. In Chomsky's term this will mean converting competence into performance.

#### **Stage one: forming the declarative knowledge**

Stage one of this path is the forming of declarative knowledge which means establishing knowledge of grammar rules or pattern in the learners' mind. In other words this stage is the stage in which students learn the form or pattern and teacher should make sure that the form is established there in the students' mind. This can be done through whatever approach depending on the teacher's preference. But please bear in mind that, as Rutherford (1987:17) says theories of grammar are not theories of language acquisition. So in order that students get the form teacher should employ description which is pedagogical in nature because as Corder (in Rutherford, 1987) states grammatical description is basically to help learner learn whatever it is he learns. In short what the teacher should do is get the essence of the grammar and describe it in a language familiar to the students. To make it clear, the problem here can be illustrated with the teaching of *passive voice*. The steps in this stage should end, with whatever approach the teacher prefers, with the students' understanding that English passive sentence is formed by placing passive verb after a subject. This should include all types of sentences, affirmative, negative, yes-no question, and wh-question, and all sentences. Because the aim is for the students to have declarative knowledge, teacher should have them explicitly mention the form. With

this we can assume that the knowledge of passive voice is now there in the students mind.

### **Stage two: maintaining declarative knowledge**

It is true that students have understood the concept of passive voice, but that knowledge may disappear from their mind. Students should make a lot of contacts with passive voice. For this a teacher should provide them with exercises of which the purpose is to reinforce the understanding that is already there. Care must be taken in creating exercises so as not make the bored because it is too easy or frustrated because it is too difficult. Exercise of whatever form should provide challenge and at the same time guarantee the feeling of success. In this stage exercise is *form focus*, that is students is made aware of the presence of passive voice. This may be in the form of *identifying and translating passive sentences, correcting incorrect passive sentences, rearranging jumble words to make passive sentences, changing active into passive sentences, translating passive sentence into English etc.*

### **Stage three: proceduralising declarative**

It has been previously stated that the teaching of grammar should touch the realistic world that is the world of communication. The activities provided in stage two is of course not communicative and not realistic because it is only meant to reinforce the students mastery of the form. Besides that in the reality of daily language use no one will ever asks another to change active sentences in passive ones. Mastering the form of passive voice is not the end of the story. Student should experience using passive voice themselves. For this teacher has to facilitate the students with meaningful and communicative exercises. Unlike the exercise in stage two which is *form focus*, the exercises in stage three is *message focus*. The goal of this exercise is to make students produce passive sentences. But be careful so as not to think that if we are able to make students produce sentences of their own, we have provided a meaningful and communicative activity. An example of students sentence which is not meaningful nor communicative is *A banana is eaten by my sister*. Although the form is correct this sentences does not have communicative value. This sentence does not refer to the realistic world whatsoever. The sentence *English is spoken in Australia*, however, is different because it has communicative value i.e. informing that a certain language is spoken in a certain place. So the **keywords** for this type of exercises is **meaningful** and **communicative**. The basic idea is to provide logical reason for the production of passive sentences. This can be in the form of question and answers in which students have to answer with passive sentences. The exercise should be done with high intensity because the goal of procduralising stage is to create automisation,

making automatic, in using passive sentences so that students, when producing utterances, will not focus on the form but on the message. This stage demands teacher's creativity in selecting questions which can logically be answered with passive voice. Some examples of such questions are questions general knowledge *Who discovered America, When did America bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, How long did the Dutch occupy Indonesia* etc. The exercise can also be based on reading activity with a passage which contains active sentences. Questions are then derived from the passage and students have to answer them is passive.

### **The implication in high school context**

We know that grammar is not listed in English curriculum of high school. Activities is mainly based on reading with various types of genre as the topic of discussion. How can we implement the concept of declarative and procedural knowledge. Many teachers said that they cannot teach grammar because that was not the focus, not communicative, burdensome to the mind of the students etc. Although grammar is not explicitly listed as a separate subject grammatical explanation can still be of use. This is because there are many sentences which cannot be comprehended just by knowing the meaning of its words. The difference that that in the declarative-procedural concept reading passage is a means of reinforcing grammar, while in genre based learning is grammar is an aid to help comprehension. However if it is the case that passage can be comprehended by merely understanding the generic structure of the text and/or knowing the meaning of the words in it, which is very unlikely, then there is no need for the students to have knowledge of grammar.

### **References**

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