

The value of linguistics theory to teaching English as a foreign language

I Ketut Warta

Institute of Teacher Training and Science Education, Mataram, Lombok-Indonesia

Corresponding e-mail: ketutwarta@gmail.com

Abstract: The paper is addressed to the value of linguistics theory to teaching English as a foreign language. The aims of the current paper have been to examine the significance of linguistics as a theory of language to language teaching; to stimulate teachers' awareness of the position and relation of theory and practice within the area of teaching. Teachers of English are highly expected not only know how to doing thing, but they are compelled to know why they are doing such thing as teaching. To support the belief, "Teachers in performing their classroom activities are governed by particular rules", there is a theory behind teaching particular linguistic unit", information are gathered from literature readings, interviewing, and analysis on some related researches. The collected sense data are displayed by means of table. Analysis and interpretation on preliminary data indicate that some teachers do not realize that teaching is, by definition, using and applying theory. Similarly, some teachers of English are less conscious that the value of theory, i.e. its capability to providing explanation to the issues under studies, may be of assistance for them to successful classroom practitioners. Finally, teachers should realize the merit of theory as it assists them perform better. Linguistics as a theory of language is, therefore, strongly recommended to be taken into serious consideration by teachers.

Keywords: theory, teaching, linguistics

Introduction

"How do you teach your students English?" a teacher asks one of his students in a classroom meeting. By "practice," the student answers while staring at her friends. "What are among those parts of English (e.g. reading, speaking, vocabulary, etc.) you are teaching and how?" the teacher asks further. With high confidence the student says, "I teach reading; it is my subject." Inspired by such discourse a dialogue between teacher and student the author attempts to raise the issue, theory and practice, as a contentious. The topic has been "The Value of Linguistics Theory to Teaching English as a Foreign Language."

The topic becomes of interest because by implication the text above suggests that the problem of theory and practice has been or still considered serious and sustainable debate among academicians, educators, and practitioners in particular. For teachers, it is not sufficient enough just to know how to teach and what to teach. The "what" to teach and "How" to teach are crucial, but

it is even more, if not, the most important the "why" we teach. In Knight's words, the current practice of classroom activities, teaching as such, has been traditionally concerned with the "how" rather than the "why" we teach our students things as such (Knight, 2015).

Knight (2015) speaks of "The Truth, The Whole Truth, Nothing but The Truth as nothingness. He doubts if there is a true evidence to support what we are doing in the classroom means something for our students. He asks, "is there existed a room for meaningful activities?" or He questions on what we are doing in the classroom setting is something of valuable and benefit for the learners. In other words, it is of highly questioned that the message contains in every classroom practice is of contribution to the betterment of English language teaching (Knight, 2015); also available at <https://www.adventistbookcenter.com/the-true-the-whole-true-tr>. By the same token, this paper addresses the issue on the value of the linguistic theory to classroom practice of teaching. "What is the contribution of theory of linguistics to English

Language Teaching (ELT)?" Put it another way, how does ELT teachers can benefit in doing their task and develop their professionalism from linguistic theory? Answers to this question and others are considered the aims of the paper.

The word "theory" is widely applicable and usually in combination with other lexis. So, we have for instance, theory of form, theory of truth, theory of semantics, and theory of linguistics, etc. Within each theory, there are subdivisions. In theory of truth, we have such theories of correspondence, coherence, pragmatic, and semantic theories of what we believe to be true. And the term theory is defined in a wide range of meanings. Whatever the definitions provided with, the focus of the present article is that of and limited to linguistic theory. By theory of linguistics in this paper is understood as those claims on languages accounting for the description, analysis, comprehension, and synthesis the problems, issues, phenomena, events of language. Basically, there are two ways of description on language; the description on the level of sounds, in the first place, and secondly, the description on the level grammar (Kleinman, 2013; Huachuan Wen, 2013; Chomsky, 2012; Fromkin and Rodman, 2010).

Method

Justification of the claim that theory of linguistics is of significance for teaching activities, empirical study becomes imperative. Four graduate students who are teachers at some high schools in the city of Mataram were interviewed. Observation on what they are doing was carefully recorded as well and the transcription becomes the data of the study. The collected data were interpreted to understand what the data mean and say. In other words, speechless and meaningless data were interpreted to make them speak something and meaningful for the language classroom.

Results and discussion

This is a small scale study conducted in the classroom setting. Sources of the data are from interview, observation, and some documents related to the topic. It is a qualitative inquiry where the collected qualitative information was analyzed by means of qualitative content analysis. Four subjects of the study, teachers of English Education in some schools who are doing their graduate program, were interviewed. Results of the interview are displayed in the table that follows

Question "What, according to you, makes learners to be better learners?"

Table 1. Interview Qualitative Data Presentation

Respose	Data Reduction/ Analysis	Interpretation/ Theme
Respondent 1. I highly of the same opinion that students have the opportunity to use their English. This is made possible if the teachers encourage us to express our opinion and ask as many questions as possible	(i) language use; (ii) encourage; (iii) opportunity	Students' active participation
Respondent 2. Meaningful learning should help student to learn something, things such as teaching activities should be of interest, value, significance, and in relation to the real life of the students at present and future. Explanation of concept, theory,	(i) concept expl anation; (ii) making pre diction; (iii) con	Content presenta tion

hypothesis, by instructors is a necessity. By so doing
 thing such as questions from learners can better be
 anticipated and predicted. Discussion on hypothesis
 becomes important to control

Respondent 3. A good learner of English, in my mind,
 is when she/he has the ability to pronounce English
 words legible to native speakers; but the capacity to
 produce correct sounds should be followed by the
 ability to construct and produce acceptable
 sentences because language is basically a system of
 both sounds and grammar.

(i) sounds to
 hear; (ii) gram
 mar to see

Relatedness of
 language aspects

Respondent 4. I there is no good method or approach.
 Each approach has its shortcoming, weakness, and
 strength. In other words, no single method is better
 than another. A good one is the one that works.
 Therefore, the solution is the use of mixed methods.

(i) forms and
 meaning; (ii)
 formal and func
 tional

Integrated
 approaches



Figure 1 12 students from graduate program are attending their subject in the classroom (PS1) under the instruction of one instructor. The picture was taken when the classes were in progress. no one of them aware that the observation. Some important points to note are (i) speechless, (ii) class hours, (iii) in the classroom setting. This condition implies passive academic atmosphere meaning that there is no learning and even if there is, it is meaningless rather than meaningful. But, the question is, why this happened? (See, discussion).

Results

Prior to presenting research finding, data display,
 analysis of data, and data interpretation have been

carefully carried out. And they are presented in
 table. Unlike data presentation, findings of the
 studies, as it is a qualitative research are presented
 in narrative form. So, following data analysis and

interpretation as they are presented in table 01, it is found out that (1) *Active Participation*..Students' involvement and active participation during the class hours are poor; (2) *Content Presentation*. Teachers are expected to present the subject under study, course, teaching point at large and details, but this is not the case; (3) *Relatedness of Language Aspects*. Teachers of English in the mind of graduate students should be introduced not only the grammar aspect but, they (learners) should know also the sound production; (4) *Integrated Approaches*. A need of applying a number of approaches in the classroom practice has also been the result of the analysis. Teachers implicitly expressed their point of view that integrated ways of teaching is a must. Finally, (5) it is surprising enough that the visual data suggested by the picture, indicate that the students are *passive participants* rather than active. This leads to passive academic atmosphere which is considered uncomfortable, less productive, and less innovative.

Discussion

The principal findings of the current study, ACRIP for short, can be identified as Students' Active Participation, Content Presentation, Relatedness of Language Aspects, Integrated Approaches, and Academic Atmosphere Passive respectively. What all these findings mean for teachers education and others who are of interest of the study will be discussed in the lines that follow. The presentation of the discussion follows narrative method and alphabetically in order.

Active participation of students during classroom practice has been considered determinant factor for successful language learning. Language learners should be provided the opportunity to actively involve during the classroom practice. Teachers who are in charged during the class hours should be aware of the significance of time allocated to learners to practice their language. Language use, therefore, is of great importance, if not, the greatest. Encouragement by instructors to learners in order to use their language is somewhat compulsory. Indeed, practice, or use as the implementation of theory should be given equal emphasis. Discrepancy in proportion of theory and practice may lead to different and poor performance. Learning outcome in TL (Target Language) of

students, depends, to some extent, on how much time they spend in using the language both in/outside the classroom setting (Nation, 2012; Kleinman, 2012).

Background knowledge on language use in this context becomes very crucial. Knowledge such as speech acts theory, linguistics, for examples, descriptive linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmatic linguistics, and discourse analysis are of highly recommended to be introduced to learners. As they are concerned with what and how language is used, in order for the students be able to use the TL language learners should be scheduled a course on theory of language use. Or they are unable to function in the TL because to use a language is to apply the theory of that language (Badib, 2013; Kurnia, 2013, and Chomsky, 2012).

Content presentation from students' stand point should be explicitly presented in every courses understudy. Teachers are expected to encourage students to have sufficient knowledge on language. Introduction to language as rule-govern behavior, language as a system of sound and grammar, and various kinds of theory should be inclusive in classroom practice. If language is considered as a system of sound, in order for the learners to be able to communicate in the TL, they should know what the sounds of the TL. is like, how they are produced, and where the sound production are made. Phonetics and phonology, therefore, become compulsory in classroom practice. Teachers should be aware of all these important content subjects to be presented in their teaching (Liton, 2012; Harun and Abdullah, 2014; Chomsky, 2012; Fromkin and Rodman, 2010).

Theory and practice are interdependent. The first is part of the second; the second depend on the first to some extent. Theory of language use is a road map that guides the students to function culturally and socially appropriate in the language. Both theory and practice should walk hand by hand. They are inseparable. To put one aside from another is like a dog-headed human. It is dehumanization. A man with no logical capacity might speak the language but, it is meaningless speech. The claim that "language is human" is understood in this context as any language one speaks is to include sound

aspects, phonetics and phonology, and grammar aspects, morphology, syntax, and semantics, should be offered and scheduled to learners. Other important dimensions of language to be considered are the culture and literature of the native speakers. Briefly stated language teaching should involve the teaching of language, culture, and literature. “Relatedness of Language Aspects.” is the most important finding of the study (Badib, 2013; Kurnia, 2013; and Kleinman, 2013).

Teaching is what teachers are doing in the classroom setting; it is something practical. Teaching activities, by definition of the terms, is applying some sort of method, approach, or theory, or principles of teaching. The belief that there is no best and perfect method of teaching, if it is proved true, as the author sees it then there is one thing teachers should do. “Never use single method of teaching, but rather teachers are highly suggested to apply integrated approach.” Holistic, wider perspectives, wholeness, are strongly recommended. “Integrated Approach” as another finding of the study might be of alternative for teachers to help learners be better language learners. In short, teachers should develop the ability to do two things, to doing analyzing and to doing synthesizing (Kleinman, 2013; Knight, 2015).

Analysis of visual data by means of observation indicates that academic atmosphere as the author

References

- Badib, A.A. 2013. Pragmatics in Language Teaching. *JOLLT*, Vol. 2, Tahun 1, November 2013, 87-92.
- Chomsky, N. 2012. *The Science of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fromkin, V. and Rodman, R. 2010. *An Introduction to Language*. New York: Cengage Learning.
- Harun, H. and Abdullah, N. 2014. The Role of “Language” in ESL Learning. *Paper Presented In MICOLLAC 2014, Malaysia, 12-14 August 2014*.
- <https://www.adventistbookcenter.com/the-true-the-whole-true-tr>, (retrieved may3, 2018: 15.08).
- Huachuan Wen, H. 2013. *Chomsky’s Language Development Theories: Rescuing Parents*

sees it is passive. Live situation as it is expected to be, does not occur. Condition as such does not help students learning something. Meaningful learning requires students and teachers involve in interaction. If language is, as it is previously viewed, use then students should be actively engaged during the class hours. “Speaking the language is rule-govern behavior”, argues Searle (1987). In order for the students to function in the TL they have to follow the principles or rules embedded in the language. This is what Chomsky (2012) calls “language is rule-govern.” Social rules, sociolinguistics or macro-linguistics and linguistic theory or micro-linguistics should be integrated in their application for practice both in or and outside the classroom setting (Searle, 1987; Fromkin and Rodman, 2010).

Conclusion and suggestion

This study has been conducted to search for the pattern or structure of the value of linguistic theory to teaching practice. Based on the interpretation of the results, the conclusion is that classroom atmosphere should be comfortable. Secondly, the material should be varied, cover all aspects of TL.; they are presented in integrated approach. Finally, students should be encouraged to be active in their participation. Bearing these all in mind, it is highly suggested that teachers should developed their professionalism.

- out of Dilemma, International Journal of Learning & Development*
- Kleinman, P. 2012. *Psychology: A Crash Course in the Science of the Mind*. New York: Adams Media, Inc. Lihat Lewin’s Field Theory, dalam Kleinman, 2013, p.130.
- Kleinman, P. 2013. *Philosophy: A Crash Course in the Principles of Knowledge, Reality, and Values*. New York: Adams Media, Inc.
- Knight, R. G. 2015. *The Truth, The Whole Truth, Nothing But The Truth*. Michigan: Pacific Press Publishing.
- Kurnia, F.D. 2013. La Langue and Parole in Literature: Curriculum and Material Development. *JOLLT*, Vol. 2, Tahun 1, November 2013, 93-107.
- Liton, H. A. 2012. Developing EFL Teaching and Learning Practices in Saudi Colleges: A Review. *International Journal of Instruction*

e-ISSN: 1308-1470, July 2012, Vol.5, No.2p-ISSN: 1694-609X.

Nation, P. 2012. The Role of the First Language in Foreign Language Learning. *ASIAN EFL JOURNAL*,

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/> retrieved, 2 May 2015

Searle, J.R. 1987. *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.