Coordinating inductive and deductive grammar teaching in higher education setting

Siti Aisyiyah

Department of Language, Communication, and Tourism,
Politeknik Negeri Jember, Indonesia

aisyiyah@polije.ac.id

Abstract

Grammar is considered as a complicated subject for most English learners. This makes the learners are not interested in learning grammar. Moreover, many teachers usually tolerate learners' weakness in grammar. Grammar has been a controversial topic for years; nevertheless, learners' grammar acquisition and awareness can improve the quality of their English skill. To have good acquisition and awareness in grammar, the learners need a long and continuous process. Therefore, learners are required to have autonomy in learning grammar. Learner autonomy refers to learner's responsibility for their own learning process. This paper reports a study on how to foster learner autonomy in grammar class by combining *learner-centered grammar teaching* and *explicit grammar teaching*. Learner-centered grammar teaching is an inductive approach that was carried out through group discussion, presentation, and language awareness activities. Meanwhile, explicit grammar teaching tends to be deductive, and in this study, was done to review the learners' materials in presentation and reinforce their acquisition. Those two different approaches were applied due to differences in learner's characteristics and needs. The result showed some success in the practice of autonomy, indicated by changes in learners' attitude. However, many learners showed that they focused more on obtaining score than on developing their language acquisition. By implementing the approach, the teacher can assist learners to be aware of their ability to learn independently and equip them with the skill needed for long-life learning.

Keywords: Learner autonomy, learner-centered grammar teaching, explicit grammar teaching.

Introduction

Learning language requires learners to learn language construction or grammar. Thinking about the rule of language construction can cause learners of English as a foreign language feel difficult. Grammar is considered as a complicated subject for most English learners; therefore, they are not interested in learning grammar. This condition is worsened by some opinions that consider grammar is not an essential thing to learn. Many teachers usually

tolerate the learners' weakness in grammar, but it should not be ignored without trying to improve the weakness.

Grammar teaching has been a controversial topic for a long time. Recent works have also addressed the debate over whether or not grammar should be taught in the ESL or EFL classroom (Novawan, 2012). In this study, it is important that learners' grammar awareness and acquisition can improve the quality of their English skill. Nunan (1998) states that no one seriously interested in the development of second and foreign language has ever suggested that learners do not need to master the grammatical system of the target language; the debate has been over how learners can best acquire the target grammar. Wilkins (1976) in Nunan (1998), argues for a notional syllabus, that is, one of which the basic building blocks are the meanings and concepts expressed through the language, not the grammatical elements. However, he also points out that acquiring the grammatical system of the target language is of central importance because an inadequate knowledge of grammar would severely constrain linguistic creativity and limit the capacity for communication. In other words, as stated in Novawan (2012), grammar shall be seen as a mediating tool which facilitates learners of EFL to engage fluently in spoken and written communication.

In terms of methodology, the debate has been over the procedures through which learners attain mastery, whether and to what extent they should undertake exercises with a deliberate focus on form, or whether they should pick up the grammar in the process of meaningful interaction. In addition, it is necessary for the learners to have language awareness because the best way to acquire good language is being aware of the language learned so that they are able to correct their own mistakes and improve their language.

To have good awareness and acquisition in grammar, the learners need a long and continuous process. Therefore, learners are required to have autonomy in learning grammar. Dincer, et.al. (2010) states autonomy is basically described as an individual's taking responsibility for his/her own learning and seen as one of the most significant features of life-long learning process today. Therefore, modern language teaching approaches and innovations in this area have made language practitioners focus largely on the concept "autonomy" in an educational setting in recent years. Experts made new attempts to define the concept and many different definitions giving insights into "autonomy" exist from the literature. Some of them, as cited by Dincer (2010) collected from various sources are listed below;

- ✓ Autonomy is the ability to take charge of one's own learning.
  (Holec, 1981 in Yan, 2010).
- ✓ Autonomy is a capacity for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action.
  (Little, 1991).
- ✓ Autonomy is recognition of the rights of learners within educational systems.
  (Benson, 1997).
- ✓ Autonomy is the capacity to take control of one's own learning.
  (Benson 2001).
- ✓ Autonomy refers to self-governance or self-regulation and differs from independence
  (Ryan & Deci, 2006).

Learner autonomy has been claimed to be an ultimate goal of education for a long time and has been identified as a complicated capacity that potentially has a great impact on

personal growth and achievement (Benson, 2009 and Dang, 2010 in Dincer, 2010). Autonomy positively affects language learning and it is no doubt that learner autonomy is a prerequisite for effective language learning. It enables learners to develop a sense of responsibility, awareness, and self-reflection where they can manage to study on their own more efficiently (Balcikanli, 2008 in Dincer, 2010). During the past decades, researches have claimed that learner autonomy can increase motivation to learn and consequently increases learning effectiveness (Sanprasert, 2010 in Dincer, 2010).

It is common that learners are not willing to take responsibility for their learning process and will not find it easy to reflect critically on the learning process. That is why there is a need for an attempt in ongoing classroom practice to foster learner autonomy. This paper describes how to foster learner autonomy in grammar class by combining learner-centered grammar teaching and explicit grammar teaching.

Method

This paper is a descriptive study. It means the data collected take the form of words or pictures rather than numbers (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). The goal is to describe attempts to foster learner autonomy in grammar class, in which the teacher applied the combination of learner-centered grammar teaching and explicit grammar teaching. Learner-centered grammar teaching was carried out through group discussion, presentation, and language awareness activities. Meanwhile, explicit grammar teaching was done to review the learners' materials in presentation and reinforce their acquisition.

The participants consisted of 69 students of English Department Politeknik Negeri Jember who enroll grammar class. The data was collected through observation and personal documents. The observation was used to get data about learner activities in grammar class, including group discussion, presentation, and language awareness activities. Video recording contained learner conversation record. Personal documents provided data about learner language awareness. The collected data was analyzed qualitatively and comprehensively.

Discussion

The teaching-learning process of grammar in English Department Politeknik Negeri Jember is divided into two different classes. They are a 60 minute - lecture or theory class and a 120 minute - practicum class. The grammar class was enrolled by 69 students. In the theory class, the whole learners joined the class altogether. Meanwhile, in practicum class, they were divided into three classes of 23 learners each. Formerly, the theory class was held by teacher presentation, and the practicum class was mostly carried out by doing written exercises provided on students' worksheets. That condition resulted in the learners who were less active and relied only on teacher instruction. Without the teacher's instruction, they used to do nothing related to their learning process.

To improve the learner attitude in grammar class, it is necessary to introduce them with learner autonomy. Promoting learner autonomy is essential when teaching grammar in the language classroom (Maehara, 2008). Nowadays language teaching is viewed in a broader educational value than merely developing learner's linguistic and communicative skills. That is, teaching learners who can use a language is not sufficient. According to Kohone (2001) in Maehara (2008), promoting learner autonomy in language learning entails rather holistic goals because learning is based on the belief that all learners are part of their own society.

There are some reasons why learner autonomy should be promoted. Little (2008) defines two general arguments in favor of trying to make learners autonomous. First, if they are reflectively engaged with their learning, it is likely to be more efficient and effective, because more personal and focused, than otherwise; in particular, what is learned in educational contexts is more likely to serve learners' wider agendas. Second, if learners are proactively committed to their learning, the problem of motivation is by definition solved; although they may not always feel entirely positive about all aspects of their learning, autonomous learners have developed the reflective and attitudinal resources to overcome temporary motivational setbacks.

Besides, Little (2008) adds in the particular case of second and foreign languages there is a third argument. Effective communication depends on a complex of procedural skills that develop only through use; and if language learning depends crucially on language use, learners who enjoy a high degree of social autonomy in their learning environment should find it easier than otherwise to master the full range of discourse roles on which effective spontaneous communication depends.

Learner Autonomy

In general, learner autonomy refers to learner responsibility to their own learning process. Holec (1981) in Maehara (2008) defines learner autonomy as "the ability to take charge of one's own learning". While Thanasoulas (2008) states that the term autonomy has come to be used in at least five ways:
   a. for *situations* in which learners study entirely on their own;
   b. for a set of *skills* which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning;
   c. for an inborn *capacity* which is suppressed by institutional education;
   d. for the exercise of *learners' responsibility* for their own learning;
   e. for the *right* of learners to determine the direction of their own learning.

Additionally, Little (2008) defines learner autonomy as a holistic view of the learner that requires us to engage with the cognitive, metacognitive, affective and social dimensions of language learning and to worry about how they interact with one another. The cognitive dimension refers to thinking and reasoning skill. This dimension is closely related to brain activities in receiving, manipulating, and processing information.

Metacognitive dimension is identified as general skills through which learners manage, direct, regulate, and guide their learning, i.e., planning, monitoring, and evaluation (Wenden, 1998). In the planning phase, the learners identify learning goals and define how the goals can be reached. This phase is usually carried out before the learning process takes place. Besides, this phase can be done when the learning process is in progress, that is called *planning-in-action.* If so, it is possible for the learners to change their learning goals and consider the method to reach it.

The next phase is monitoring. In this phase, the learners monitor their own learning process. They monitor how they learn and identify the difficulties they face. The last phase is the evaluation, in which the learners evaluate the outcome of their learning process. Further, Wenden states that evaluation has three steps. Those are: 1) the learners examine the outcome of their learning process; 2) the learners define criteria for assessment; and 3) the learners apply the assessment and evaluation.

Affective dimension deals with learner's attitudes. Attitude is a part of a learner's perception about themselves, other people, culture in which they live, or culture related to what they learn. Attitude is also related to how the learners respond to what happens in their environment. Besides, the attitude is much influenced by learner's motivation. The motivation can be classified into two kinds. They are intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation comes from the learners themselves, while extrinsic motivation comes from their environment.

The social dimension is related to the learners' skill in communicating and interacting with others in their learning process. To be autonomous learners, they are required to have good communication skill. They need to interact not only with the teacher but also with their peers or other learning resources.

In the grammar class, not all of those aspects could be done to foster learner autonomy, particularly in sharing the setting of learning goals. Due to the policy of developing the curriculum, the learners were not involved in designing the course program. Hence, the learning goals were taken from course syllabus available in the English Department. However, the learners understood the purpose of their learning program because the teacher introduced the syllabus at the beginning of the course. Besides, they were explicitly informed about their responsibility in the learning process. The teacher also gave opportunities for the learners to take initiatives in doing learning activities and selecting learning resources. Next, they were trained to review their learning and evaluate its effectiveness. To foster learner autonomy in grammar class, the teacher applied the combination of learner-centered and explicit grammar teaching.

Learner-Centered Grammar Teaching

The concept of learner autonomy is closely associated with the concept of the learner-centered classroom. The learner-centered approach does not mean leaving learners alone without the teacher's support. Instead, the teacher's role is even more significant than that in teacher-centered instruction (Tudor, 1993).

Edwards (2004) introduces an action research process for the teachers who aim at learner-centered grammar teaching; the teachers who want to encourage their students to find out a grammatical rule for themselves come up with a principle that students should learn inductively. The inductive (rule-discovery) learning means the learners first study examples given by the teacher and work the rules out for themselves. On the other hand, deductive (rule-driven) approach means the grammar rules are simply presented by the teacher. In other words, the deductive approach refers to explicit grammar teaching.

The inductive approach also promotes the cognitive ability of learning. It helps the learners develop the skill to investigate and explore language autonomously. Harmer (2001) names the inductive approach "discovery learning" and points out that discovery learning may not be suitable for all learners because there are two types of learners: analytical and holistic. Analytical learners extract rules from examples and test hypotheses, while holistic learners learn best by doing little or no analysis; instead, they learn by exposure to large chunks of language in meaningful contexts (Celce-Murcia, 1988 in Maehara, 2008). Therefore, discovery learning may not be suitable for holistic learners but suitable for analytical learners. Teachers should take learner variables into consideration. Every learner has different learning strategies and styles, and not all learners take a single approach.

In this study, learner-centered grammar teaching was carried out through group discussion, presentation, and language awareness activities. Those activities were done in practicum classes. The learners in each class were divided into some groups of three or four learners. Each group was given a particular topic to learn. They decided their own time to search the references from various resources and discuss the topic in groups. The activities could encourage the learners to be active in the learning process, and train their teamwork skill. Nevertheless, there was a weakness because some learners did not learn actively. They only relied on other members who were active.

Having discussed the topic in groups, each group was responsible for presenting the discussed topic in a class discussion. To activate the learners in presentation activities, the teacher noted the learner's participation. The learner's participation in those activities was one of consideration in giving the final score. By implementing presentation activities, the groups could learn from each other, improve their self-confidence and speaking skills.

Next activities were related to learner's language awareness. Masats (2006) defines awareness as "being aware of something" and "knowing about it, either because you have thought about it or because you have just noticed it". In the context of second language learning, Stern (1992) argued in favor of developing language programs whose educational goals went beyond proficiency objectives and stated that there was the pedagogical need to introduce a general language awareness component into the language curriculum. Stern believed that what he referred to as "the general language education syllabus" should have four major educational goals. First, it should help students understand the nature of language and overcome if any, misconceptions about learning and language. Second, it had to approach language and the speech community bound to it. Third, it ought to give students some insights into first language acquisition to help them come to grips with the process of learning a second language. And finally, it had to enable learners to develop their autonomy and become responsible for their learning.

The language awareness activities in the grammar class were done by the learners by reviewing their language performance written and orally. Learner's written performance was got from their activities in writing a composition individually. Afterward, they identified any kind of errors occurred in their work and made corrections to the errors. Meanwhile, learner's oral performance was taken from their conversation with their partner. Here, the learners make a conversation in pairs, and their conversation was recorded in video. With the video, the learners wrote the transcript of their conversation. Next, they reviewed their performance by identifying weaknesses and errors in the conversation. Having identified the errors were required to make the correction. From those activities, the learners were able to have reflection and evaluate their learning process.

Explicit Grammar Teaching

Explicit grammar teaching, that refers to a deductive approach, was done to review the learners' materials in presentation and reinforce their acquisition. It is necessary for the teacher to review and explain the topic more clearly to ensure a better understanding of the learners. Besides, it could be beneficial to give reinforcement to what the learners learned from their learning activities.

The followings are some studies related to explicit grammar teaching. Legenhausen in Gardner (2011) states for many teachers embarking on the route towards implementing more

learner autonomy the question what to do with grammar seems to be extremely important. They all too often see it as the major obstacle towards passing over responsibility to their learners, because it is here that the former teaching orthodoxy conflicts most obviously with their new agenda. There is more often than not a deep-seated belief that complex grammatical phenomena call for some kind of 'expert explanation' since it is widely assumed that young learners cannot work out the rules themselves.

The conventional belief system holds that grammatical explanations (explicit grammar teaching) provide some kind of 'shortcut' towards mastering and internalizing the rules, and thus facilitating acquisition processes. On the other hand, the teachers' experience with recurrent learner errors, which persist despite intensive teaching endeavors, might have raised some suspicion that there are limitations to the effects of grammatical instructions. The traditional arguments concerning the effects of explicit grammar teaching run along the following lines: grammatical instructions allow learners to understand the linguistic regularities, which means that they lead to metalinguistic knowledge. If they are complemented by intensive code-focused practice, the rules will then be internalized. In other words, grammar instruction in combination with practice results in implicit knowledge, which enables learners to access the rules and apply them in communicative situations (Legenhausen in Gardner, 2011).

In addition, Shaffer (1989) investigated the deductive (explicit grammar teaching) and the inductive (learner-centered grammar teaching) approaches using different instructors, one Spanish and two French teachers. In the inductive learning process, students were required to express orally what they had learned about the rule in the lesson. It was effective for these instructors to confirm learners' understanding of the rule. The inductive approach was thought to be unsuitable for complex structures or, at least too difficult for weak learners. However, Shaffer's research findings suggested that the inductive approach worked efficiently for both the hardest structure and weakest learners. Furthermore, the inductive approach enhanced active participation by students. Shaffer suggested that teachers incorporate both inductive and deductive approaches into their classroom in a meaningful context.

Evaluation

According to Dam and Legenhausen (1999), evaluation in autonomous language learning involving linguistic and other outcomes combines internal and external assessments. Internal assessment consists of surveys, learners' self-reflection, and teacher-learner talk. External assessment comprises such tests as grammar, vocabulary, and discourse structure. In the autonomous classroom, learners are stimulated to develop the capacity of critical reflection on their learning process; thus, the focus is more on internal than external assessment.

In this study, the evaluation was conducted by observing learner's attitude during the teaching-learning process and analyzing learner's written and oral performance. Learner's attitude was observed during the presentation, discussion, and language awareness activities. Meanwhile, learners' performances were analyzed from their composition and conversation.

The result showed some success in the practice of autonomy, indicated by changes in some learners' attitude. Some learners showed a positive change in the learning process. They were responsible for their learning, had the initiative to solve their problems, and improved their grammar mastery. However, some learners showed that they focused more on obtaining score than on developing their learning autonomy and language acquisition.

Conclusion

In order to prepare for the rapidly changing world, autonomous learning is crucial for learners to live independently in a globalized society. That is why, fostering learner autonomy is a must in language learning, including grammar class. To foster learner autonomy, the teacher could apply various approaches suitable to learner's characteristics and needs. Regarding learner's difference in the grammar class, the inductive and deductive approaches were applied in this study. The inductive approach refers to learner-centered grammar teaching, while the deductive approach refers to explicit grammar teaching. In learner-centered grammar teaching, the learners were provided some activities including group discussion, presentation, and language awareness. Meanwhile, the explicit grammar approach was carried out to give a better understanding and reinforce learner's knowledge. With their autonomy in learning, the learners are expected to improve their grammar mastery and internalize the rules in communication. By implementing the approach, the teacher can assist learners to be aware of their ability to learn independently and equip them with the skill needed for long-life learning.

References

Bogdan, R.C. and Biklen, S.K. (2007). *Qualitative Research for Education.* Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Dam, L. & Legenhausen, L. (1999). Language Acquisition in an Autonomous Learning Environment: Learners' Self-evaluation and External Assessment Compared. In S. Cotterall & D. Crabbie (Eds.), *Learner Autonomy in Language Learning: Defining the field and effecting change*. Peter Lang.

Dincer, et.al. (2010). Practical Tips on How to Promote Learner Autonomy In Foreign Language Classrooms. *The 10th International Language, Literature and Stylistics Symposium*, 3-5 November 2010, Ankara, Turkey.

Edwards, C. (2004). Language teacher development from inside-out: Some activities for professional awareness-raising. *The Language Teacher*, 28(7), 16-20.

Gardner, D. (2011). Fostering Learner Autonomy in Language Learning. *The Faculty of Education at Zirve University*, Gaziantep, Turkey. http://ilac2010.zirve.edu.tr

Harmer, J. (2001). *The practice of English Language Teaching*. Essex, England: Longman.

Little, D. (2008). Learner Autonomy and Second/Foreign Language Learning. *Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics, and Area Studies.* http://lang.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/goodpractice.aspx?resourceid=1409

Maehara, Y. (2008). *The Effectiveness of Learner-Centered Grammar Teaching. Journal of Foreign Language Education.* Vol.5, (2008), p.115-143

Masats, D. (2006). *Language Awareness*: An International Project. http://jaling.ecml.at/pdfdocs/articles/English.pdf

Novawan, A. (2012). Visually-based grammar teaching. In Widodo, H. P. and Cirocki, A. (Eds), *Innovation and Creativity in ELT Methodology.* New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

Nunan, D. (1998). *Language Teaching Methodology*. London: Prentice Hall.

Shaffer, C. (1989). A Comparison of Inductive and Deductive Approaches to Teaching Foreign Languages. *The Modern Language Journal*, 73(4), 395-403.

Stern, H. H. (1992) *Issues and Options in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thanasoulas, D. (2008) What is Learner Autonomy and How Can It Be Fostered? *The Internet TESL Journal,* http://iteslj.org/Articles/Thanasoulas-Autonomy.html.

Tudor, I. (1993). Teacher roles in the learner-centered classroom. *ELT Journal*, 47, 22-31.

Wenden, A. (1998). Metacognitive knowledge and language learning. *Applied Linguistics, 19*(4), 515-537