

THE CONTRIBUTION OF LINGUISTICS KNOWLEDGE TO THE FIELD OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the correlation among linguistics and English language teaching in non-english speaking countries. Since it is a library research, the researchers gathered the information by using secondary sources. This paper generally consists of three parts. The first part defines general review of linguistics and language teaching. In general review of linguistics, the researchers describe the elements of linguistics, whereas in language teaching review, the skills of language are elaborated. The second part is about the historical connection between linguistics and language teaching. Meanwhile, the last part discusses about the contribution of linguistics theories elements, and branches to language teaching. The result of this research discovers that linguistics theory, elements, and branches have an immense contribution to language teaching, and becomes an indispensable part of language learning.

Keywords: *Linguistics, education, non-english speaking countries, language teaching*

Background

According to Aitchison (2003), language is “a patterned system of arbitrary sound signals” (p.21) which is used for various communicative purposes. It does not only help people to express meaning, but also “to establish and maintain social and interpersonal relationships” (Scarino & Kohler, 2009, p.16). Due to its importance, it is essential for people to learn all aspects of language. School, where children spend many of their time at, certainly has an important role in this case. Scarino and Kohler (2009) mention that school should not only teach grammar and vocabulary of a language to children, but also how “language is used to create and represent meanings and how to

communicate with others” (p.17). Along with native language, English language is also substantial to be learnt since it is the most widely used language in the world. As said by Renandya (2016), English is “now used by a much greater number of people around the world and for far more diverse communicative purposes in different social settings (p.3). In other words, it is used as an international communication which connects people overseas. Therefore, English language nowadays is used as an instructional media in teaching and increasing academic comprehension. In order to equip the students with great English language skills, teachers who understand linguistics well are definitely needed.

Linguistics alone refers to the systemic study of language covering wide range of topics and branches (Aitchison, 2003). It is inseparable from language teaching because it gives a worthwhile contribution for the development of language teaching programs. Similarly, Khansir (2013) mentions that linguistics have given an enormous influence to the theory of language teaching which cannot be overlooked in language teaching field. To add, Meng (2009) sees a great link between linguistics theory and language teaching practice, emphasizing on the use of real language. Based on the discussion above, this paper attempts to show the contribution of linguistics to language teaching as well as the relation among them.

Finding & Discussion

1. Linguistics and Language Teaching

This part discusses about the general review of linguistics, and language teaching. In addition, it reviews the history on how linguistics becomes a part of language teaching.

1.1 General Review of Linguistics

As we have mentioned earlier, linguistics is the systemic study of language encompassing phonetics, phonology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. Aitchison (2003) elucidates phonetics as the study of human speech sounds. On the other hand, phonology is essentially the description of the systems and patterns of speech sound in language which is surrounded by syntax that “refers to both the arrangement and the form of words” (p.9). Meanwhile, semantics tend to focus on meaning and pragmatics “deals with how speakers use language in ways which cannot be predicted from linguistics knowledge alone” (p.9). It also has several branches which connect language with external world namely psycholinguistics, linguistics, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, computational linguistics, anthropological linguistics, and philosophical linguistics (Aitchison, 2003). Its branches that have strong relation with language teaching are

applied linguistics which is defined as “a collection of applications of linguistics at various levels to the language teaching operation” (Corder, as cited in Khansir, 2009, p. 1140); sociolinguistics which is the study about how language is used in society; and psycholinguistics which “explores what goes on human mind as an individual acquires, comprehends, produces, and stores language” (Aitchison, 2003, p.132)

1.2 General Review of Language Teaching

On the other hand, language teaching is a process and action to transfer knowledge of language to students that aims to enhance students’ skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking (Irmawati, 2014). It covers a series of methods containing “the set of teaching practice, approaches, and materials” (Hilgendorf, 2012). Throughout the history, language teaching methods had changed several times due to the shift of view about the kind of proficiency students require as well as “the changes in theories of the nature of language and of language learning” (Richards, 2014, p.3). These changes are certainly indispensable to the linguistic aspects that in some way influence the change of vision in determining the proper teaching methods. We will explain further on how linguistics is related to language teaching theory in subsequent section.

1.3 The Historical Relationship between Linguistics and Language Teaching

In the late of 19th century, scientists did not regard linguistics and language teaching as two related disciplines. As it was said by Lamendella (as cited in Meng, 2009), the field of language teaching needs applied psychology instead of linguistics, and it was a big mistake to put linguistics as the basis of language learning. This assumption, however, changed during the Second

World War in which the connection between linguistics to language teaching was first noticed. Back then, America deeply needed soldiers who were able to speak foreign languages and hence a group of linguists applied the knowledge of linguistics to teach language and the result was very great (Meng, 2009). This obviously breaks the notion that linguistics and language teaching have no relation at all.

2. The Contribution of Linguistics to Language Teaching

This section discusses about the contribution of linguistics theories and linguistics elements to language teaching.

2.1 The Role of Linguistics Theory in the Theories of Language Teaching

It is undeniable that linguistics theories have a huge influence in the emergence of language teaching theories. To understand this, we can take a look on audio-lingual method of which the invention is based on structuralism and behaviorism (Meng, 2009). Structuralism can be defined as a linguistics approach investigating unit such as sounds, words, and sentences, and also describing language as a whole in scientific and objective way (Xia, 2014). It views language “as a system of structurally related elements for the encoding of meaning, the elements being phonemes, morphemes, words, structures, and sentence types” (Richards, 2014, p.55). Meanwhile, behaviorism which is derived from the research of human behavior explains on “how an external event (a stimulus) caused a change in the behavior of an individual (a response) without any kind of mental behavior” (Meng, 2009, p.85). Bloomfield then combines both theories as the basic principles of audio-lingual theory emphasizing on speaking and listening as the most important skills in learning language (Xia, 2014). Audio-lingual method, thus, places reinforcement as

substantial elements in the process of learning with the hope that behavior will be repeated continuously until it turns into a habit. For the classroom practices itself, it has dialogues and drills as the basis in which the correct stress, pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation become the primary focus.

However, in 1960s, British applied linguists found out that audio-lingual method was not effective to be used. They assumed communication proficiency is much more important to be developed rather than mastery of structures. It hence leads to the development of a new method—Communicative Language Teaching. Hymes (as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2014) mentions that communicative language teaching is built through linguistics theory of communication emphasizing on meaning. Similarly, Halliday also argues that linguistics focuses on “the description of speech acts or texts, since only through the study of language in use are all the functions of language, and therefore all components of meaning brought into focus” (as cited in Richards, 2005, p. 159). Communicative language teaching differs from audio-lingual method in terms of target view. It assumes that the target system of linguistics will be achieved through the communication process, on the other hand, audio-lingual method emphasizes on patterns-system teaching in order to help the students gaining the target system of linguistics. Both also have different goals in which audio-lingual method puts linguistic competence as the main goal, while communicative language teaching has communicative competence, such as the skills to use linguistics system well, as their goal (Richards, 2005). In the classroom practices, communicative language teaching indeed engages series of activities that push the students to actively communicate such as presentation and mini-drama. There are

five characteristics which underlie this approach applications, and one of them is psycholinguistics processing that “engages learners in the use of cognitive and other processes that are important factors in second language acquisition” (Johnson & Johnson, as cited in Richards, 2005, p. 173). In addition, linguistics also contributes to another method which is Total Physical Response (TPR), but it may not as much as its influences toward audio-lingual method and communicative language teaching approach. Total Physical Response (TPR) is developed by Harold and Dorothy Palmer based on psychology, learning theory and humanistic pedagogy but it uses structural syllabus in which “grammatical and lexical criteria being primary in selecting teaching items” (Richards, 2005, p.75). Linguistics thereby affects the syllabus making of TPR methods.

From the discussion above, we can draw a conclusion that linguistics indeed contributes to help teachers improving their teaching skills through the language teaching theories they are inserted on. In other words, it takes part in educational researches by giving an empirical foundation for language learning evaluation and effectiveness. The existence of teaching theories like audio-lingual method, communicative language teaching, and Total Physical Response (TPR) in this case, provide guidance for teachers in helping the students to achieve linguistics competence as well as distributing the knowledge of language to students in a great way. It is surely impossible for teachers to teach well without mastering the theory first because theories will guide teachers to get “practical mastery of the materials” (McCormick, 1997, p.9). The teachers thus have to gain deep comprehension toward such rules to themselves before transferring the knowledge to the students and arranging classroom activities that fits

the teaching goals. Furthermore, as it is said by Lewis (as cited in McCormick, 1997), “the provision of such theoretical information facilitates the student's own systematization of the linguistic experience to which he is being exposed, and is largely identical with intellectual development” (p.9). This is to say that teachers’ great understanding toward teaching theories will highly assist students to achieve linguistics skills and intellectual progress.

2.2 The Role of Linguistics Elements in Teachers’ Mastery of Language Skills

An important requirement for being a good teacher is definitely related to subject-matter knowledge. As it is said by Baugh (2005), “middle school and high school teachers are subject area specialists, and must have in-depth knowledge of their specific specialization” (p. 11). This clearly conveys that teachers should have good understanding of knowledge in order to transfer it. They will not be able to explain certain materials in detail if they do not know well about it. This also applies to language teachers. A language teacher will be unable to teach language if they do not comprehend the science of linguistics, given that linguistics is a study of the elements embedded in language. Fillmore and Snow (2000) then state that there are some linguistics elements which teachers should master in teaching language. Firstly, the teachers should own the awareness of English word formation. This is to help teachers to explain “smallest meaningful units of language such as free and bound morphemes as well as inflectional and derivational markers” which is very beneficial to students in reading and comprehending academic vocabulary (Oz, 2013, p.99). In other words, teachers with good morphological knowledge will succeed in making the students understand the

passages better. It then can bring students to gain great reading skills.

Furthermore, Oz (2013) conveys that a main task of the teacher is to appreciate the various dialects that may come from the students. Regarding to the last aspect, “understanding dialect carried by the students’ phonological rules provide teachers with insight into the pronunciation patterns of learners in the classroom, as well as explanation for the consistent difficulties that language students experience in speaking” (Grab & Stodler, 2006, p. 6). This is to say that the differences of dialects in the classroom will inspire teachers in teaching pronunciation and indirectly tell them about the difficulties faced by the students when speaking in target languages. The knowledge of phonology, phonemic, and phonetics thus are very needed by language teachers to comprehend students’ dialect, to teach pronunciation, and to avoid students error when they are spelling words.

The teachers should also have the awareness of the sounds sequences which is very meaningful in teaching pronunciation. As it is delivered by Trask (as cited in Saidi, 2017), pronunciation is “the manner in which speech sounds, especially connected sequences are articulated by individual speakers or by speakers generally” (p.1). It is usually connected to the phonetics study which covers the explanation of speech sounds, and so it has opened a new brilliant thought to pronunciation teaching. Phonetics also “forms a tool of paramount importance that is used in the teaching of pronunciation” (Saidi, 2017, p.1).

Another substantial linguistics element that the teachers should have is the knowledge of pragmatics. In speaking, pragmatic competence is indeed required to reach “the ability to analyze language

in a conscious manner” (Holmes & Brown, as cited in Castillo, 2009). Earlier, we have given the definition of pragmatics which is the discipline of manner in delivering meaning through communication. Castillo (2009) elaborates further that the main purpose of pragmatics is “to study the use of the individuals’ language with the most accurate level of appropriateness and correctness possible on their performance according to the context or situation where language used” (p.9). Concerning with language teaching, pragmatics knowledge assists teachers to teach students on how to convey the meaning appropriately based on certain conditions such as greetings and apologies. Of course, it is significant for students in order to keep up their social relationship with their surroundings that the teachers should not omit it from teaching and learning process. Besides speaking skills, pragmatics knowledge is also beneficial in improving someones’ “awareness of listening skills” that help people to interpret meaning better (Castillo, 2009, p.30). When teachers are equipped with such knowledge, they will be able to communicate well with their students because as it is said by Garcia (2004) that pragmatic comprehension enables people to “understand a speaker’s intensions”; “interpret a speaker’s feelings and attitudes”; “recognize sarcasm, joking, and other facetious behavior”; as well as “be able to respond appropriately” (p.1).

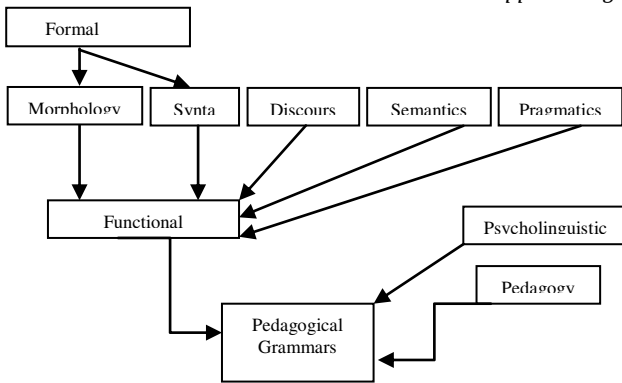
Similarly, semantics which refers to the study of meaning in the words and phrases also be the notable linguistics element that cannot be abandoned in language teaching. Moreno (2015) further explains that semantics supports teachers and language education to fulfill the needs of assuring that the students really learn the target language and “finding the correct ways of transmitting the knowledge they need in order to be

proficient on it” (p.2). Another fact that makes semantics necessary for language teaching is the existence of lexical relations such as homonymy, polysemy, synonymy, and antonymy. Such lexical relations which are usually included in textbooks permit students to find a connection among words as well as increase their vocabulary. When students have a wide range of vocabulary possession, of course, they can increase their speaking and writing skills. This also works for teachers in a way that if teachers keep many vocabularies in their mind, they will not find any difficulties in explaining certain materials, especially in target language. Just like what Moreno (2005) said that semantics is “indirect appearance on the textbooks and learning theories make clear how important and how supportive it is when becoming a speaker of language” (p.3). From those aspects above, it is proven now that there is a the profitable connection among linguistics elements and language teaching. They are the key of success in actualizing the goal of language teaching and learning—which is generally to “go beyond the individual to those of the community and the society” (Cook, 2013, p.53). They assist students in mastering language skills namely listening, writing, reading, and speaking and take the teachers to the improvement of accuracy, fluency, and effectiveness in using the language when teaching.

In addition to the discussion above, linguistics elements basically transform into various types of grammar in language teaching field. The first type which is formal grammar puts their focus on form and structures rather than meaning or context, and therefore “morphemes being the smallest language component they operate with” (Burner, 2005, p.17). Furthermore, Burner (2005) explains that such kind of grammar is neglected in today’s high schools since it just allows

students to learn the rules of morphology and syntax as well as language principles without having them learning grammar in wider context. The expansion of this grammar is called functional grammar which is based on systemic linguistics accentuating the use of language in various situations. It is introduced by Michael Halliday in 1960s and is “very useful in showing how texts work beyond the level of the sentence, how different texts are structured and how language varies to suit the purpose of the users” (Feng, 2013, p.86). According to Schleppegrell (2004), functional grammar is, the other way around, widely used in many schools nowadays, especially in the applications of speaking and writing. Many classroom practitioners believe that functional grammar is very effective to help students from non-English speaking countries to master English well. Meanwhile, pedagogical grammar refers to grammar use for some purposes and designed for foreign language students (Newby, n.d). In relation to linguistics, pedagogical grammar is related to other elements such as psycholinguistics and pedagogy by means of questioning some essential points “as to how languages are learnt, what role our first language (L1) plays when learning a second language (L2), what types of teaching methodologies help enhance learning as compared to others, and so on” (Burner, 2005, p.22).

Burner (2005) provides a vivid scheme of the relation among linguistics elements and those grammars above as follows:



From this scheme, it is obviously seen that grammar can be interpreted in many ways and that linguistics help educational practitioners to define and divide kind of grammars which is then applied in grammar teaching. It is hence essential for teachers to master those linguistics elements first before explaining to students in order to teach well.

To sum up, Bhavinkabens (2014) explicates that the insight of linguistics elements can be used to organize the different facets of language teaching such as the teaching of grammar and composition, spelling and reading, literary and technical varieties of language. The system of syntactic and lexical analysis and scientific descriptions of language can be used for planning lesson plans, producing pedagogical orientated grammars, monolingual and bilingual dictionaries and producing “user” and “use” based materials. It is true then that “the place of linguistic is behind the classroom teachers” (Stevens, as cited in Bhavikaben, 2014, p.4).

2.3 The Role of Linguistics Branches in Language Teaching

Due to the various cultural background of students in a class, some of linguistics branches are also considered as crucial parts of language teaching. According to Lee (2005), linguistics branch such as sociolinguistics has to be applied in classroom practice, alongside with those linguistics elements that we have explained earlier, because it offers a valuable cross-language perspective for teachers. Teachers need to know students’

communicative resources and background and examine the differences and similarities between cultural assumptions in a multilingual and multicultural class to get them acquire the language, so that teacher can succeed this with the help of pragmatic knowledge.

In addition to sociolinguistics, Hung (2005) who deals with the application of corpus linguistics in classroom elucidates that corpus linguistics provides teachers not only with worth evidence for the state of language, but with unlimited authentic materials for teachers in constructing language learning tasks. Teachers thus will be able to develop materials for different population, design teaching method and assessments, sharing the perspective of teaching to other teachers, and develop an effective ways in teaching language with different language background. Besides, students will also get the benefit from the teachers’ knowledge of language structure and ability to make certain aspects of language vividly.

On the other hand, the knowledge of applied psycholinguistics will help the teachers in developing second language teaching materials which can improve students’ motivation. This is certainly important because “learners’ motivation is one of key factors in second language learning and acquisition that should be considered in order to be successful in teaching” (Ramadhana, 2013, p. 10). It will also help teachers in understanding students’ psychological condition in language learning as students may come from various background.

Thus, some linguistics branches such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and corpus linguistics are also beneficial in language teaching. It assists the language teachers to understand more about the

students' condition both socially and psychologically

Conclusion

Language is a media of people to communicate with their surrounding and thereby it is such an obligatory for people to learn language. Besides native language, English language learning nowadays cannot be ignored as English has been an international language which connects people around the world with various intentions. A school, in this case, clearly plays an important role for producing people who are fluent in English. To achieve that goal, it is the teachers' task to understand the knowledge of linguistics first because linguistics really helps language teachers in many ways and really improves the teaching skills of teachers. Linguistics aspects are proven to contribute in English language teaching field in which its theories underlie some language teaching theories. As the example, structuralism theory influences the principles of audiolingual method that help teachers to teach speaking and listening skills; as well as the syllabus making of Total Physical Response, while linguistics theory of communication is later derived into Communicative Language Teaching approach. In addition to linguistics theory, linguistics elements are also inseparable from language teaching given that linguistics is the soul of language. In the pedagogical implication, the linguistics elements like morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics deeply affect teachers language skills in reading, speaking, listening, and writing. Thus, English teachers are required to understand linguistics knowledge well. Otherwise, the goal of teaching and learning language is never achieved. Some linguistics branches such as sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics should also be owned by teachers in order to gain a deep understanding toward the social and

psychological conditions of students. Meanwhile, corpus linguistics helps teachers in preparing suitable materials.

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