

THE ROLE OF LINGUISTICS IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Antonius Yuwono
(*English Department, Tidar University*)

Abstrak

Linguistik merupakan ilmu bahasa yang berkembang dari waktu ke waktu. Perkembangan ilmu bahasa ini memiliki peranan penting dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris. Mahasiswa diharapkan mengetahui perkembangan ini dan memiliki pengetahuan tentang kebahasaan sehingga mereka mampu mencari atau menerapkan metode yang cocok dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris pada saat mereka menjadi guru nanti.

Keywords : Linguistics – language – language teaching

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Related to the above topic, one may come to wonder or at least to think that everyone seems to believe linguistics has much to say about language teaching especially teaching English as a second language. In other words one may become doubtful. One then may think it is justifiable for many people either linguists or experienced English teachers strongly argue that linguistics should have something to do with language teaching, while others seem to differ on that issue. The writer thinks that language teachers can get some advantages from the description made by the linguists about language. It is the linguists' right. Chomsky says at the recent conference of language teachers that linguists never intend to address themselves to the problems of teaching a language since the task of linguists is simply concerned with observing, studying and trying to formulate the rules or description of how people actually speak.

Now, how about English teachers – should they go along in the same line with that idea just mentioned ? The answer is “No”. They have to search possible ways to profitably relate it to the problems found in the teaching. Teachers should not study a science simply, without any particular and justifiable reasons for the sake of it, but they should attempt to achieve as much profit as possible from it. For instance English teacher who studies chemistry is not solely for the sake of chemistry or his or her knowledge on that field but rather try to get possible benefit from it – and to solve his or her problems.

With this concept, let us now discuss some possible contribution of linguistics to the teaching of English. Knowledge of linguistics will be more useful for English teachers to find a suitable method in teaching it.

2. General Views of Linguistics

Linguistics is as a broad term – with various kinds of views, dozen of schools starting from so called Pre scientific up to modern Generative Transformational Grammar. In this paper the writer will not take all those “uncountable” kinds of linguistics schools but rather pay attention to some of them namely :

- Traditional Grammar
- Descriptive Linguistics
- American Structural Linguistics
- Generative Transformational Grammar

In this case teachers of English should know and understand these four approaches. By knowing them, a teacher can improve his or her capability to teach and find a suitable way in solving teaching problems.

In the same way, Traditional grammar and American linguistics are used as linguistics theories envisaging the role of linguistics in the teaching of English in our schools. These two theories have largely applied in the development of the teaching English as a foreign language. Further, we may also see the role played by the work of rationalist in language teaching.

3. The Contribution of linguistics to the teaching of English

As the writer mentions in the previous chapter that these four schools of linguistics should be well understood. Now let us have a look at them.

3.1. Traditional Grammar

This grammar is not infrequently labeled as ‘Prescriptive Grammar’, in which, I think there is a bit misunderstanding. First of all, what so called Prescriptive grammar is the study of scholars in the 16 th century that is before Jespersen and others, which are primary concerned with formulating and fixing rules for the correct usage of English. Traditional Grammar, to clarify what we mean by this, involves the work of grammarians in the 16 century until about in the middle of the 18 th century, but deriving from nearly two thousands years of study of which Aristotle, Plato and others were originator. That is to say, this grammar is not simply dealt with formulating rules of the language. Now let us see the principal ideas of this grammar and their contribution to the teaching of English particularly in our school.

These Grammarians based on their study on the inflected language i.e. Greek and Latin. They consider that language is universal since the grammar of The languages are the same everywhere. As the reflection of this concept toward Language, thus, the Psychology’s share to language teaching, there appears what we call Translation method – the remnants of which is still visible in our schools. If we observe many teachers of English who like to use translation method. In this case the students are asked to translate English text or sentences into Indonesian or vice versa. Further more there is something worth, I think, to put forward the linguists’ views on the Traditional Grammar. David Crystal sates “ if it means anything, attempt to summarize the state of mind . . . , associated with many schools of thought. Similarly, Chomsky states that not only do they (Traditional Grammarians) make a fairly clear and well-founded distinction between deep structure and surface structure, but they also go on to study the nature of deep structure and provide valuable hints and insight concerning with the rules that relate to the abstract underlying mental structure to surface structure . . . “

From this point of views, we may infer that Traditional Grammar is mentalist in itself – there are ideas about nature of meaning, stemming from the scholastic debates of the Middle Ages, ideas about parts of speech. Sentence structure containing of subject, predicate, object and so on. They set up a classification of eight part of speech, namely, noun, verb, pronoun, adjective, adverb, preposition and conjunction. The process of analyzing sentence, for them consists of giving technical terms to the position of the total meaning. Their sentence analysis, which is based on meaning, in which they have clauses – main clause and sub clause, further definition as the following: “Subject” is word or words in a sentence about which something is predicated. “Predicate” is part of a statement which says something about the subject. “Direct object” indicates thing or person that receives the action of the verb, and so on. The above description, with several points which can be easily understood had an un- doubtful impact in the English teaching, even in our to-day schools.

In addition, there are also some explanation about what each part of speech means in the preceding chapter, in which the author defines and explains and has some translation of the definition and examples.

3.2. Descriptive Linguistics

Some traditional Grammarians departed from their principles to some extent. Such Grammarians founded the new trend in linguistics which is known as “Descriptive Linguistics”. This trend was started by the work of J. Winteller in his study of a Swiss dialect. His study was concerned with the sound of language.

Similarly, the great British phonetician, H. Sweet with his book “A hand Book of Phonetics”, Otto Jespersen and others were independently dealt with the sound of language. This period is usually called Pre De Saussurian linguistics So it is obvious that these grammarians realize that language is not only written form, but also the spoken form. It is not also universal but differs from each other.

Their description of language is, therefore, different from that of Traditional Grammar – they pay much attention to the sound and forms of language but meaning is still considered. It was about this time – by the end of the 19th century, a new element was introduced to language teaching, that is to say descriptive phonetics was incorporated by Viktor to language teaching. He proposed a new approach to language teaching that based on Behaviouristic Psychology's views with its classical conditioning, Pavlove's experiment, children learn L1 through association of language with rewarding experiences and L2 learning should be as much as possible like L1 language in situation.

Using “spoken language” as a starting point, he introduced a new method that is called direct method. This method later becomes one of the most widely known method in teaching. The teacher teaches to use everyday vocabulary and grammar and creat a real situation or oral presentation.

3.3. American Structural Linguistics

As we have labeled the previous one as Pre De Saussurian Linguistics, therefore it can be termed as post Saussurian. By this labeling is meant that we take Saussure who is usually called the father of modern linguistics, as relative “end” and “start” of Descriptive and American Linguistics respectively. It is worthwhile, for this reason, reviewing briefly his work we discuss our point. In 1878 Saussure published a book in which he discovered some fundamental principles – law of palatals postulating their structural function rather than their phonetics shape. Then in 1916, after his death, Belly and Sechebaye published Saussure's notes in his lecture between 1906 – 1911, in University of Geneve (Course in General Linguistics).

In this book he proposed a series of dichotomies which later are used by contemporary linguists as starting points of their linguistics theories, such as diachronic versus synchronic, la langue versus la parole, paradigmatic versus syntacmatic and other. He also discussed the subject matter and the scope of linguistics either American Structural Linguistics or Transformational Grammar. At the beginning of 20th century, Franz Boas, an anthropologist, published his book resulting from that he was inspired by

the above European trends, which exerted an important view on future development of linguistics, particularly in United States. Linguistics here, however, did not show much difference from that of European until the first world war.

Edward Sapir, under the influence of Boaz, appeared with his book “Language” (1921), then, Leonard Bloomfield with many contribution to this linguistics which make a great development of particular trend from European linguistics. Other linguists’ exertion such as Pike, Nida, Fries are of account as well. While in European linguistics De Saussre ideas were developed by the linguists of Prague School. These American Structural Linguists, as our heading above, believe that linguistics has something to say for language teaching, that is to say, before the teaching of foreign language can be embarked upon, a thorough contrastive analysis – sound, grammatical and structural. System – between the students’ vernacular and the target language are to be provided, from which the teacher can anticipate the problems which are likely to meet in the teaching. For this purpose, Sapir in his “Language” discusses element of speech (Chapter II, sound of language (Chapter III), the problems of forms (Chapter IV and VI). To mention some of them with a descriptive analysis of each aspect of language, or in this case English.

Similarly, Bloomfield in his “Language” (1933) with 28 Chapters which are devoted to the description of grammar, lexis, phonology and others. While other linguists describe English to somewhat more details.

Consequently, it is the teacher’s task to relate those provided materials or to make best use of them such as a contrastive analysis with his or her students’ vernacular with regard to careful selection, proper grading for his class-room presentation. The next development achieved by American structuralists in thirties and fourteens, brought about a new view in language teaching. They strongly proposed that language is a set of habits, and they considered a language on its descriptive nature not its prescriptive one. Further more Bloomfield in his language (Chapter II) clearly stated his

behaviouristic view of language – refusing mentalistic theory – of which we can summarize by the following formula :

$$S \text{ ----- } s \text{ } r \text{ ----- } R$$

A practical stimulus (S) prompts a speaker to speak instead of reacting practically, (r) stands for a linguistic substitute reaction by the speaker, While (s) a linguistic substitute stimulus in a hearer which prompts him to perform a practical reaction (R). S and R are practical events in a sense, and r-s are speech events.

If we are to relate these mentioned views to language teaching, according to Bollinger, it is quite unjustifiable to directly associate them with the birth of Audio lingual practices. Harold Palmer, who is not primarily a linguist but an English teacher, in his “Principles of Language Study” (1921) had defined language learning as “a habit forming process” and skills that should be achieved are understanding, speaking, reading and writing as he proposed. In my opinion, however, what we know that the so called audio Lingual method usually used in our teaching – appeared under the contribution of American Structural Linguistics and behaviouristic Psychology, with the reason :

First, Palmer, who was an English teacher based his principles on his experience in teaching English, particularly to the Japanese students, in which he found that his teaching was not successful for method he use was reading method. This is to say, regardless how the process of requiring the language by the learners (as Bloomfield explains). Hence by “habit forming process” he suggests in a simple practical sense without considering how stimulus – organism – Response work.

Second, based on the above principles, the students will imitate the sound and structures they hear, which then reinforced by approval or comprehension. Repeated occurrences of the response and reinforcement form a habit. Scientific linguistic does not regard language in terms of meaning, it only regards language in terms of forms, because meaning is un-

measurable. Learning a language is a matter of establishing the forms into a habit, and it is done by a lot of imitations and exercises.

Based on the above theory, let's have a look at the following principles that are stated by structuralist :

- Language is spoken form not a written form
Structuralists determine that language is mainly spoken form not written form. Written language is merely representation or reflection of the spoken form that is why they emphasize spoken form rather than written form. Spoken must be developed before they learn the written form.
- A language is a set of habit not rules,
Structuralists consider language as human behavior. Language is a kind of human habit. Language mastery is habit establishment, and establishing a habit can be done by doing a lot of practices and exercises. Patterns drills are the result of this consideration.
- Teach the language not about the language.
In this case we only teach the language, it means that we only teach the students how to use the language.
- Language is what native speakers say not what they ought to say.
There are often many exceptions in the "language rules", we are not supposed to analyze them. Just imitate what the native speakers say. We should learn the language as it is without any analysis. That is why the materials presented in the form of dialogues and memorization (mim – mem)
- Language are different and treat them differently.
Languages have their own system of sounds, words and structures. We should not compare one language to another. They also assume that analogy provides better information than analysis. They emphasize quick response to language stimulus and that error should be eliminated in advance by careful structuring of drill and exercises.

3.4. Generative Transformational Grammar

This version of grammar is presented by the work of Chomsky (Syntactic Structure, 1957 - Aspects of the theory of Syntax, 1965), Morris Halle (Bases on Phonology and Phonology in Generative Grammar, 1960), and many other linguists.

The first publication of Chomsky has been considered to revolutionize linguistics world. In this book, Chomsky makes the description and distinction between “competence” (the speaker’s knowledge of his language) and “performance” (the actual use of language in a real Situation) which are similar to De Saussure’s dichotomy. “langue” and “parole” respectively.

These two kinds of dichotomy are not exactly the same since Chomsky would not accept that competence can be described in terms of collective consciousness. On the contrary competence is seen as a set of processes possessed by the individual and developed in him as part of his maturation. Chomsky puts more stress on competence for it is a systematic, stable element of language. In performance he says , much that needs to be said about language that cannot be observed. In the other words, linguistic competencies considered to underlie linguistic performance.

In his “Aspect of Theory of Syntax” he states that the problems for linguist, as well as for the child learning language, determines from the data of performance and the underlying system of rules that has been mastered by the speaker and that he puts to use in actual performance. In this argumentation, he suggested that the linguistic competence is an essential element of language, and language learning is the process of mental. If we are in an effort to relate the linguist’s description to our teaching we should not forget that we teach the language to human being, who live and think. Thus we should not teach simply the acceptable grammatical sentences or patterns, regardless necessity.

Teaching the following sentences :

Our nice pot passed away yesterday

The trees was barking when I passed by

We have to teach those sentences grammatically, not semantically. Acceptable sentences should be avoided. We have to teach sentences or patterns that can be easily understood by the students.

Chomsky, then, introduces the terms “deep” and “surface” structure, the former is structural description of the content and the later is that of the substance. To clarify these two terms let us take an English grammar problem that he discusses in “Current Scene in Linguistics” (1965) that is a comparative adjective – noun, examples:

(1) I have never seen a man taller than John

(2) I have never seen a taller man than John

In this case we can apply the rule of comparative adjective – noun. This rule will appear as a special problem of the very general rule that forms such construction in sentences like :

(3) I have never seen a man taller than Mary

If we look at the above sentences number (1) is perfectly analogous but we have to consider the sentence :

(4) I have never seen a taller man than Mary

The surface structure is the same as that of (2), but let see its deep structure :

Mary’s height is 150 centimeter

His height is 160 centimeter

He is taller than Mary

He is a man. Mary is a man

The last one is an implied information, which is not expected, deriving from applying the mentioned rules. So as our propose, let us take a benefit from such analysis in our teaching. Transformationalists also put stress on

ambiguity of sentence, to which the former grammarians did not pay attention. We may teach our students tenses past or present perfect, for instance :

(5) They have de-carded clothes (present perfect)

(6) The man commanded the students to shout forcefully

In this case we should be careful to take the example because the students will interpret (5) as an example of present tense (have – verb transitive) in which the subject “they” owned discarded clothes. But it is also possible for them to think that it is a present perfect tense (have – auxiliary) in which the subject “they” have thrown their clothes away. Another kind of ambiguity is found in sentences like (6) “forcefully can modify the main verb “commanded” or modify verb in the complement of the sentence “shout”. When we further observe the grammar of English, we certainly find “oddness” which cannot be taught by Behaviouristic – structural method. Let us take one of the examples :

Usually we teach our students that “some” can be used in positive forms, while “any” in negative and interrogative forms. In real use of English conversation this rule is not applicable, let us see the following examples :

(7) Does some one want this whisky ?

(8) Does anyone want this coffee?

(9) If he eats some candy, let me know

(10) If he eats any candy, let me know

All these sentences are grammatically and usually used in a real communication, but there are situation where each is properly used – particular situation may allow us to use (7) instead of (8) or vice versa, and so does for the sentence (9) and (10). Although we have drilled the students to use or apply the above rules to the patterns or sentences, they inevitably find the use which is “out of rules”.

For this reason, mentalist approach to the teaching may offer an advantage in which the students have to learn the patterns of abstraction. In conditioning theory learning process must be one of “meaningful learning”. That is to say that the above case cannot be simply Taught imitative, repetitive drills but the students will understand the situation of the contexts. They are not simply to imitate for they are naturally provided with cognitive power in learning. From this view we have what they call modified, up to date Grammar Translation Method. So far we have dealt with some possible contributions of linguistics to the teaching of English as a foreign language, there certainly other possibilities that I am not yet able to put forward in this paper.

4. Conclusion

After dealing with the topic in details, let me now draw conclusion that linguistics does provide language teachers with theories about language – how it operates, what is the essential characteristics are, how it is learnt by human beings and so forth. In order to make this paper easily understood let me draw a rough diagram of the development of those discussed themes in linguistics, Psychology and Pedagogy to sump up this explanation

| No | Linguistics | Psychology | Pedagogy |
|----|---|---------------------------|--|
| 1. | Traditional Grammar | Mentalism | Translation method |
| 2. | Descriptive Linguistics | Classical Behaviourism | Direct method |
| 3. | American Structural Linguistics | Neo behaviourism | Aural – oral method |
| 4. | Generative Transformational Grammar | Mentalism | Cognitive code Learning Or Grammar Translation Method |

In addition, Linguistics always develops and revised therefore language teacher ought to be open minded and keep pace with the development of this science and to bring about better result of teaching.

Another important thing for an English teacher, in this case is that it should not make any different for him whether what he takes from linguistics is based on one theory or another, and I hope this paper will be useful for students of English in learning linguistics.

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