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INSERTING JAVANESE ACRONYMS FOR TEACHING GRAMMAR RULES: A Theoretical Assumption

Heri Susanto

Abstract

Teaching grammar approaches have been applied one after another in the class for quite some time. However, the approaches may match to some students and may not to some others. The appropriateness and the effective usage of teaching grammar approaches can help students to facilitate the language process more comprehend (Thornbury,2006). Oxford (1989) states that there is a relationship between students' variables and the choice of Language Learning Strategies (LLSs). Students' variable likes students' background language can be used as a media to transfer the grammar. For example when Javanese students learn English grammar, then the strategy used can be linked with the Javanese way of thinking. In addition, there must be an appropriate strategy to bridge between the LLSs and the students' language background. Teaching grammar using acronyms is one of the ways to bridge between LLSs and Javanese in the class.

Key words: teaching grammar, language learning strategies (LLSs), Javanese acronyms.

1. Introduction

Teaching grammar should use appropriate strategies since appropriacy is important for teaching success. One strategy could be appropriate in one class but it is possible not appropriate for other classes. Thornbury (2006:27) states that no class of learners is the same, therefore it is not a guarantee that an activity that works for one class is not necessary going to work for another.

Two of the factors of giving appropriate strategy are based on the learners' needs and cultural factor (Thornbury:2006). In one place perhaps learners study grammar for test but others want to study grammar for talk. Some students may have English as their mother tongue; yet, other students may have English as a foreign language. Furthermore, Richards and Theodore (2003) asserts that learners are the key participants in the class. Therefore teachers should match the teaching strategy and the learners' factors.

This article proposes one strategy of learning grammar that is inserting acronyms into grammar rules presentation. Jensen and Markowits (2003) state that an acronym, whose function is to memorize names or words by emphasizing on the first letter of each word, is one of mnemonic strategies. This strategy will link between the learners' background language and English grammar teaching. Hence, I hypothesize two points of view 1) the learners hopefully still maintain their first language linked to English grammar as target of learning, and 2) the learners will have higher motivation to learn English grammar since they learn language with fun.

Many researchers have developed various techniques for effective study strategies. Presley and Dennies (1980) state that one of techniques is memory technique or mnemonics in science instruction in middle school, high school, and adult education. Moreover, he adds that mnemonic instruction may be one of the more effective ways to improve eight-grade science knowledge.

2. Teaching Grammar Strategy

Teaching grammar is not as easy as it seems since there should have better treatment matched with the target of teaching. Thornbury (2006) explains there are ten factors to consider when determining appropriacy. The factors involve age, level, size of the group, constitution of the group whether monolingual or multilingual, the need, interest, materials and resources availability, cultural factors, and educational context whether the students study at school or somewhere else.

Moreover Thornbury (2006:27) stresses on the way of teaching grammar between different ages must be considered deeply. He says

The age of the learners is very important. Researchers suggest that children are more disposed to language learning activities that incline toward acquisition rather than toward learning.....Adult learners, on the other hand, may do better at activities which involve analysis and memorization

In other words, there should be various activities offered when to teach children grammar than to teach adult. In other way, adults can be taught grammar more serious way, such as giving them memorization

analyzing the grammar rules. Pressley & Dennis-Rounds (1980) investigated the use of mnemonics at two different age levels (middle school vs. high school students). The results showed that only the high school students were able to successfully transfer the memory strategy to other dissimilar information. Therefore, there will be another treatment applied for the children. The treatment may be conducted by giving role-play, sing a song, and other not too serious ones.

The activities of teaching grammar have been developed by using various methods tried out in the classrooms for years. The following chart will show the progress of methods applied from the trends in the past up to now.

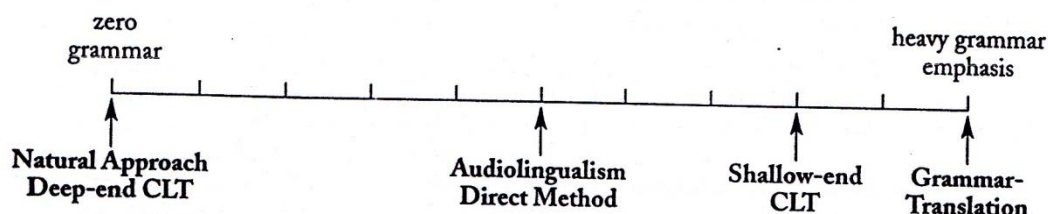


Figure 1. Methods of Teaching Grammar (Thornburry:2006:23)

Those methods reflect that the researchers try to figure out the best methods for teaching and learning process in one time to the next time. When one method is appropriate to one class, other methods will also be applied to other classes until they fit to the needs of the learners. Moreover, Thornburry stresses that grammar teaching can mean different things to different people. Therefore, figure 1 may show the methods that have been used in one time and a place based on the needs.

Thus, what is the strategy used for teaching grammar recently? This question appears since there are various approaches or strategies offered by the researchers. Recently, the appropriate approaches have been openly self chosen based on the needs of the institution needs. Richards and Theodore (2003:253-254) mention nine factors that have influenced the use of the approach in the past or even continuously used in the future. The following five points are picked up: 1) Government policy directives, 2) Trends in the profession, 3) Guru-led innovations, 4) Responses to technology, 5) Influences from academic disciplines, 6) Research influences, 7) Learner-based innovations, 8) Crossover educational trends, and 9) Crossover from other disciplines.

3. Language Learning Strategies Researchers

O'Malley and Anna (1990) have produced an influential classified table which consists of various strategies divided into three strategies; metacognitive, cognitive and socio-cognitive. Further, many researchers still state various definition of the strategy itself. Here are three examples of strategy definitions that will correlate the need of LLS which should be connected to other aspects such as behavior and mental aspect.

1. Stern (1983): Strategies are best served for general tendencies or overall characters of the approach employed by the language learner, learning techniques as the term to refer to particular forms of observable learning behavior.
2. Weinstein and Robertayer (1986): Learning strategies are behavior and thoughts that a learners engages in during learning that are intended to influence the learner's encoding process.
3. Oxford (1989): Strategies are consisted of mental and behavioral actions which learners use to make language learning more successful, self-directed and enjoyable.

These different definitions show that one researcher has their own interpretation of meaning of strategies. Stern tends to show that strategy for behavioral target, Weinstein stresses on behavior and mental and Oxford is referring to both mental and behavior involvement.

Furthermore, Ellis (1994) states five points of good language learners which then these points will guide the teachers to take deep consideration when to choose the best LLS for the class. The following five points are picked up: 1) a concern for language form, 2) a concern for communication, 3) an active task approach, 4) an awareness of the learning process, 5) a capacity to use strategies flexibility accordance with the requirement.

Language is a part of cultural background. This is also one of essential points that was stated by Kitao cited by Genc and Erdogan (2005:74). It showed us that we need to understand not only the other culture but also our own culture.

4. Acronyms in Context

Acronym is a part of mnemonics strategies since the strategy to memorize names or words is emphasized on the first letter of each word. Congos (2006:1) defines name mnemonics "In a name mnemonics, the 1st letter of each word in a list of items is used to make a name of a person or thing". He then gives an example on how to memorize the name of colors of the spectrum with name mnemonics **ROY G.BIV** which stands for Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, and Violet.

Actually, Indonesian teachers and learners are used to using this technique called "Jembatan Keledai", for example: when teachers teach their students to memorize the name of colors of rainbow they say **ME-JI-KU-HI-BI-NI-U** which stands for MERAH (red), Jingga (indigo), Kuning (yellow), Hijau (green), Biru (blue), and Nilu, Ungu (purple) (Gunawan. 2003:123 and Harianti.2008:57).

Based on simple examples above, acronyms can be formed by combining first letters which then will form meaningful or even meaningless new words. Forming a new word like **ROY G.BIV** will associate learners to someone's name while **MEJIKUHIIBINIU** represents meaningless new words. However, both of these examples will be easy to remember for the learners if they try to associate the "new words" into other more meaningful words that they have already recorded before. Rose (1995:71) stresses that Gates made a research to find out between meaningful and meaningless new acronym. He figures out that the meaningful words are easier to recall than meaningless words. Therefore, linking the acronym with the words that the learners have learned is better than the words which purely new or meaningless words since new words will take more time for the learners to take back in the long-term memory (Richmond:2008:3).

Thus, in addition; acronyms strategy is also called memory strategy. Learners studying language, mathematics, social and other subjects may use acronyms to enhance the memory. Mastropieri (1992) states that many research have been done on the effectiveness of using mnemonic strategies to enhance school success.

The way to use memory strategy or acronyms will be successful in the classroom if it is applied in the right way. In the past, Plato and Aristotle underlined that memory is one part of learning factor that cannot be separated from association and imagination (Buzan:1986). Buzan notes "Plato assumed that once the impression had been made, it remained until it wore away with time, leaving a smooth surface once again." Moreover, Aristotle also contributed his idea underlining the core of creativity from the memory. He said that the most important parts to build creativity are association and imagination. This means if somebody wants to memorize things longer, one should associate or link it with something else and imagine it with something else that impresses the brain.

Memorizing well in the process of learning needs ways to make it remain in longer period. For instance, by plotting or chunking the longer words or numbers into small words. This way will give better results if the memory techniques are in weird, odd, vulgar, funny, or even absurd forms (Collin Rose, et al. 2007: 44). In line with this statement, Both Harry Lorayne (1995. 37-38) and Buzan (2007) agree that the more interesting the words, the better of memorizing will be.

Here is a figure to describe the process of short-term memory process which can be turned into long-term memory;

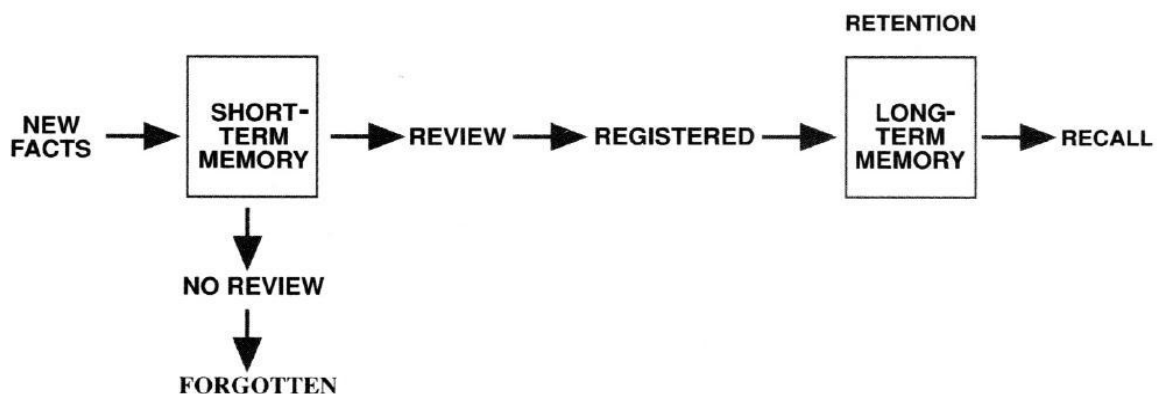


Figure 2. Rose (1995:73)

The figure 2 describes how the process of putting information into memory stored into two kinds of memories-short term memory and long term memory. Short term memory means the place to memorize a situation where the brain has not coded properly and therefore more readily forgotten. This happened since the memory is only the place to store recent information and it takes more repetition or in other

words, it requires more efforts to recall it in other time. Long term memory means situation or ideas that have been coded, filled, and stored, and it will probably remain there for years, if not for life Buzan (1986: 36).

The short term memory will be easily forgotten when no review at all after the learner receive new fact or information. On the other hand, the long term memory will stay longer in the brain if the information received is review and registered. Nevertheless; not all information is stored in the brain unless it fulfills the following criteria; 1) weird, 2) odd, 3) vulgar, 4) funny, or 5) even absurd forms. Next, Mastropieri (1998) moreover gives his techniques for enhancing memory by giving additional effort to the words that the learners want to remember longer; 1) increasing attention, 2) promoting external memory, 3) enhancing meaningfulness, 4) using pictures, 5) minimizing interference, 6) promoting active manipulation, 7) promoting active reasoning, and 8) increasing the amount of practice.

5. Inserting Javanese Acronyms in Grammar Rules

As far as I have discussed, the reshaping of the existing teaching approaches and applying LLS using acronyms strategy are possible to be applied in the classroom. Students who have their own language background, such as Javanese - may use their own language to form acronyms. By inserting acronyms strategy and involving Javanese language into teaching grammar, this strategy will bridge the maintenance of language use in the class. Therefore, this strategy is one bundle of teaching strategy to enhance the memory.

Two reasons of using this strategy, first, learners will learn something more fun than study grammar focused on purely form of rules and second, learners may use their background language to learn other languages. The two involvements in LLS hopefully will create a better result of learning. Javanese students use their own language, such as; ONO NE stands for One of, None of, Neither of and Each of which then is inserted in the rule of teaching Agreement of singular predicate. When this is done in the class for acronym, it assumes they will get proud of their own language. Combining between to use "native languages" and to learn other Languages, they will not leave their own language behind. Hence, in the foreign language or second language classroom, the activities and cultural influences cannot be separated from what is learned (Rebecca L, Oxford: 1996:x).

Several research studies have described the effects of training students with memory problems how to use mnemonic strategies independently (Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 1992; King-Sears, Mercer, & Sindelar, 1992). The earlier studies successfully trained students with disabilities to use the mnemonic procedures and then to generalize the procedures for learning new vocabulary words.

More recent studies trained students with disabilities to use the strategies across different content areas, including science and social studies (King-Sears et al., 1992; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1992). All of these studies demonstrated some positive benefits for training students to use mnemonic strategies independently. King-Sears et.al taught students the **IT FITS** strategy:

Identify the term.

Tell the definition of the term.

Find a keyword.

Imagine the definition doing something with the keyword.

Think about the definition doing something with the keyword.

Study what you imagined until you know the definition. (King-Sears et al., 1992, p. 27)

6. Summary and Implications for Teachers and Students

As far as I have discussed and after reviewing teaching grammar strategy, LLLs, and Acronyms articles, I conclude that the use of involving students' background language (Javanese) and applying acronyms in the LLS are possible to apply in the class since these are needed to maintain the "native language" and to motivate the students. Moreover, the usage of acronyms in teaching grammar rules aims will help the teacher and the students not only cope with classroom tasks but also continue to learn which is to promote self-autonomous learning. Therefore, here I will propose points of how teachers could teach Javanese Acronyms in the class:

1. Teach acronyms for adults students
2. Associate acronyms into meaningful words
3. Define the acronyms
4. Practice the acronyms into real grammar rules
5. Use the acronyms into grammar test
6. Repeat the acronyms often

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