

## Assessing Grammar By Using Communicative Activities To Employ Students' Skill And Ability To Use English

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**Abstract:** Employing communication activities for teaching grammar can be a useful skill to learn and offer variety to the students and cater to the needs of learners who are keen to develop their ability to use English. It can be turned into a useful and even enjoyable enough experience, if real life tasks, student problems and teacher requirements are taken into consideration and brought into balance in assessing grammar. To develop authentic assessment grammar activities, begin with the types of tasks that students actually need to do using the language. Grammar Assessment can then take the form of communicative drills and communicative activities used in the teaching process. It is related to scoring form and grammar assessment and also how language teachers need to adapt their scoring procedures to reflect the two dimension of both declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. The qualitative case study reported in this paper explored the assessing grammar skills and ability in declarative and procedural knowledge regarding a communicative approach in grammar class. semi-structure interviews and Questioners are used to collect the main source data. The results showed that the students felt their grammar class more challenging by having some types of tasks measuring the students' grammar skill and ability. It built up their curiosity, interest and motivation in learning grammar.

**Keywords:** Grammar Assesment, Declarative and Procedural Knowledge, Grammar in Communicative Activities

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Success in learning English as a foreign language manifest in the ability employing various skills which are important for communication both orally and in a written form these language skills include listening and reading (receptive skills) as well as speaking and writing (productive skills) yet, success in performing these four language skills are essential dependent upon some language learning components, such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Among those three language components, grammar is considered as the most important component for more advance language learning.

The role and status of grammar in language teaching has been a topic for heated debate for centuries. the prestige of grammar suffered a decline in the 1970s, when the communicative approach started to gain wide currency. As will be pointed out below, a "strong" version of the communicative approach actually denies grammar of any place in the language curriculum. This strong view, however, gave rise to growing dissatisfaction with the communicative approach in the 1990s. Ellis (1997) called the "strong" version of the communicative approach, communication activities such as problem-solving tasks, role-plays, and information-gap activities took up nearly all the learning activities were complemented by form-focused exercises, e.g. controlled practice of structures

First, after the communicative approach was introduced in the 1970s and implemented in the 1980s, it came under critical evaluation in the

early 1990s. According to Celce-Murcia, (1991), one criticism that has often been made against the approach relates to the pedagogical treatment of linguistic form. What this means is that in a reaction against earlier methods which placed grammar at the centre of learning, many advocates of communicative language teaching encouraged an emphasis on meaning over form. For example, the strong version of the communicative approach adopted a non-interventionist position regarding formal instruction, and assumed that grammar would somehow take care of itself when learners engaged in communicative activities. However, this view that language can be learned incidentally and implicitly has been challenged by the principles of cognitive psychology, which hold that "for learning to take place efficiently the learner must pay attention to the learning objective and must then practice the objective so that it changes from part of a controlled process to a part of an automatic process" (Celce-Murcia et al., 1991, p.145). Thus, the notion of "consciousness-raising" Borg, S. (1998) which suggests that learners should be *deliberately* directed to attend to form, was proposed as an important process of language learning. In more recent years, other related concepts have also been introduced to highlight the need to focus on grammatical structures.

Most of the early debates about language teaching have now been resolved; however, others continue to generate discussion. For example, most language teachers nowadays would no longer expect their students to devote too much time to describing and analyzing language systems, to

translating texts or to learning a language solely for access to its literature; rather, they would want their students to learn the language for some communicative purpose. In other words, the primary goal of language learning today is to foster communicative competence, or the ability to communicate effectively and spontaneously in real-life settings. Language teachers today would not deny that grammatical competence is an integral part of communicative language ability, but most would maintain that grammar should be viewed as an indispensable resource for effective communication and not, except under special circumstances, an object of study in itself.

In many assessment contexts today, knowledge of grammar may be inferred from the ability to use grammar correctly while reading, writing, listening to or speaking the L2 – a practice based on the assumption that all instances of language use invoke the same fundamental working knowledge of grammar and that a lack of grammatical knowledge can severely limit what is understood or produced in communication. In short, language educators have defined and assessed grammatical knowledge in many different ways over the years as the notion of what it means to ‘know’ the grammar of a language has evolved and instructional practices have changed.

During the pre-study interview, Vivi expressed the belief that assessing grammar teaching should be integrated into speaking, writing, listening and reading. In fact, this was observed during Vivi's Lesson on adjective clause where students were actively discussing and writing description, rather than receiving explicit instruction on adjective clause. Even though it may seem that Vivi's beliefs and practices converge, we noted some divergence also. For example, during Vivi's Lesson on adjective clause, she made explicit grammar explanations and the activities were not contextualized into meaningful communicative situations. In fact, her grammar teaching was not incidental but structured and prescriptive.

## 2. GRAMMAR TEACHING IN THE INDONESIAN CONTEXT

When talking about grammar teaching in the Indonesian context, there are some points to ponder: (1) how the prevailing curriculum perspective guides the teaching of English, (2) how grammar should be taught, (3) how grammar teaching has been assessed so far.

### 2.1 Grammar Teaching From the Perspective of the Curricula in Indonesia

The story of the grammar teaching started from the application of the 1975. The syllabus was

structurally oriented which were rich in grammar exercise or grammar pattern drills. Teaching English under 1975 curriculum was conducted much pattern practice, reflecting the dominance of grammar teaching. In 1984, a new curriculum was introduced, having an idea that English should be taught more communicatively. The idea was supported by developing of the principles on communicative language teaching (CLT). One possible effect of this structure-based orientation is that students learned grammatical structure better than they used language skills. This was apparent in criticism that colleague graduates do not master English because their English teachers at the secondary school focused too much in grammatical patterns as declarative knowledge instead of the mastery of language skills. Yet, the condition was getting worse because the new English curriculum was misinterpreted focusing on the development of oral communicative competence only. The result, the structure-based communicative failed to help students develop abilities to communicate meaningfully. Because of this, the curriculum was revised and the Department of the Education and Culture established a new curriculum called the meaningfulness approach. The term “meaningfulness” was used to avoid misinterpretation of the term of “communicative” used in the earlier curriculum (Huda 1995).

The implementation of the 2004 curriculum, which is a text-based one, the role of grammar appears to be important because the students of English are expected to socially function. They should be equipped with the knowledge and the use of various genres. Each genre is characterized by its purpose or social function, its generic structure and its lexicogrammatical features. The aspect of lexicogrammatical features implies the need for learning grammar of language learning. The curriculum suggests that grammar be introduced to students, following Ur's (1996:78) words, “to receive and produce interesting and purposeful meanings within the context of real-life language used.

There has been discussion regarding the strategy of grammar teaching in foreign language learning. Larsen Freeman (1986) pointed out that there were a number of strategies in teaching grammar which can be categorized into those (e.g. treatment of errors, emphasis on either deductive or inductive learning, role of first language, and sequence of grammatical items) and practical (e.g. presentation of grammatical structure, essence of drills, and practice). The presentation of grammar concerns whether teachers should work inductively or deductively. The inductive approach, as the name suggests, induces grammatical within the language

input given to the learners, while the deductive approach stresses the explicit teaching (conscious learning) of grammar rules. Lock (1996) finally error correction is considered necessary for pedagogical practice.

Language teachers and language learners are often frustrated by the disconnect between knowing the rules of grammar and being able to apply those rules automatically in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This disconnect reflects a separation between declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge.

- a. Declarative knowledge is knowledge *about* something. Declarative knowledge enables a student to describe a rule of grammar and apply it in pattern practice drills.
- b. Procedural knowledge is knowledge of how to do something. Procedural knowledge enables a student to apply a rule of grammar in communication.

Procedural knowledge does not translate automatically into declarative knowledge; many native speakers can use their language clearly and correctly without being able to state the rules of its grammar. Likewise, declarative knowledge does not translate automatically into procedural knowledge; students may be able to state a grammar rule, but consistently fail to apply the rule when speaking or writing. To address the declarative knowledge/procedural knowledge dichotomy, teachers and students can apply several strategies.

## 2.2 Challenges on Assessing Grammar Ability

Grammar tests are a subset, can be used to provide test-takers and other test-users with formative and summative evaluations. Formative evaluation relating to grammar assessment supplies information during a course of instruction on how test-takers might increase their knowledge of grammar, or how they might improve their ability to use grammar in communicative contexts. It also provides teachers with information on how they might modify future instruction or fine-tune the curriculum. For example, feedback on an essay telling a student to review the passive voice would be formative in nature. Summative evaluation provides test stakeholders with an overall assessment of test-taker performance related to grammatical ability, typically at the end of a program of instruction. This is usually presented as a profile of one or more scores or as a single grade.

In relation to the the selection of grammar content, Brenda's belief that language was learned most effectively when students had a need for it caused her to focus on grammar points which arose

naturally out of communicative activities. For instance, if a writing activity required repeated use of the infinitive and students had not mastered it yet, she would present the item in class. As students had a practical need to use the target structure, according to Borg(1998)., they could take it in easily.

In this study, I also made use of written practice activities where appropriate. These typically involved students in making sentences or writing dialogues using the relevant grammar. Of these two types of activities, I showed a clear preference for dialogue writing as it established a meaningful context for the practice of grammar items:

... it is more meaningful in the form of a dialogue. After the exercise, they will have a deeper impression of the material. A significant point about the spoken and written practice which I used is that they were integrated. For example, in focusing on "adjective clause", I first got students to describe a famous person. Then, she asked them to pair up and write a short dialogue between two speakers to describe a famous person. Finally, I corrected their writing by using primary trait score. and asked each pair of students to make conversation as their dialogue which they wrote. The teaching sequence started with oral practice, moved on to writing, and ended with oral practice again, all in an integrated fashion. This reflects her view that a successful lesson involved the integration of different skills.

## 2.3 Assessing Grammar in Writing Context

1. Introduce the concept of grammar form, the grammar lecture explain the rule and the concept.
2. Have the students submit the students' response on adjective clause as their assignment before having discussion.
3. Have the students perform the presentation, discussion, questions and response on the material, adjective clause.
4. Get the students to do exercises such as class room test( multiple choice and fill the blanks)
5. *Have the students write a paragraph with the particular topic involving the material related to adjective clause (grammar in writing context as task based)*
6. *Get students to reword the incorrect passages to eliminate the errors. If the students look the error up again or have him ask questions involving the correct usage in grammatical situation.*
7. *Remind the students that if they ever have questions about grammar, consulting a grammar book can be helpful. Be certain the*

*students understand the rules that they violated originally. Repeat this process with more than one of the students' papers or written text.*

8. *Give feedback and positive washback on their writing.*
9. *Assess their writing by using primary trait score which the lecturer just consider the usage and application on adjective clause.*

The last, assess the students' achievement in grammar by using multiple choices test, because it enables her to measure the effectiveness of the specific learning objective.

## 2.4 Assessing Grammar in Speaking Context

Teaching grammar in the context of speech is one of the grammar-based learning techniques communicative where the technique is used to remember the new grammar topics. It can also record their experience which has got knowledge of grammatical results are used to facilitate their communication. Assessment of grammar in speaking context, the adaptation of Brown, (2001: 406-407) Categories oral proficiency assessment with good grammar and correct. The steps of assessing grammar in speaking context as the following :

- a. assign students to collect the student response to the simple present and degrees of comparative and superlative. As their duty before the class discussion.
- b. Establish a discussion group that includes the session, questions about the material.
- c. Provide exercises or drills with the pattern present simple materials and degrees of comparative and superlative in the form of multiple choice and essay.
- d. Menugassi students create a dialogue with specific topics covering material present simple and degrees of comparative and superlative.
- e. Provide feedback and washback on their speaking particularly on grammarnya.
- f. Assess speaking / talking to those who focus trait primary assessment score which lecturers only assess the application of the use of the simple present and degrees of comparative and superlative.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The case study investigates assessing grammar by using communicative activities to employ students' skill and ability to use English which attempted to answer the following research question : (1) How do the lecturers assess

grammar by using communicative activities to employ students' skill and ability to use English ? (2) What are the students' responses toward learning grammar assessed by using communicative activities to employ students' skill and ability to use English ?

This study adopted a qualitative case study approach to investigate the assessing grammar by using communicative activities to employ students' skill and ability to use English (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Data collection occurred over a period of two months. Sources of data included one scheduled pre-study interview with each of the two lecturers. The interview questions were designed to elicit information about the teachers' beliefs regarding assessing grammar and grammar teaching, and about different approaches to grammar teaching, including grammar corrections. Other questions were aimed at obtaining information about the lecturers' actual teaching practices as well as factors that influenced their choice of approaches and strategies.

The interviews were the primary research tool used to obtain information about teachers' beliefs about assessing grammar teaching. Three series interview each lasting one hour, were scheduled with each teacher: a pre-study interview to establish the context of each lecturer's experience, a pre-lesson interview to obtain information about the lesson to be implemented and a post-lesson interview to help the lecturers' reflect on the meaning the whole experience held for them. All the interviews were audio-recorded .

Questionnaire was used to obtain the data from the students' responses during and after the teaching and learning grammar assessed by using communicative activities to employ students' skill and ability to use English. The questionnaire was in the form of multiple choices. Whether the students enjoyed teaching and learning grammar can be noticed from the data of questionnaires.

## 4 RESULTS

The assessing grammar skills and ability in declarative and procedural knowledge regarding as communicative approach in grammar class has showed that the students felt their grammar class more challenging by having some types of tasks measuring the students' grammar skill and ability. It built up their curiosity , interest and motivation in learning grammar.

According to the data from the interviews both lecturers agree that the teaching of grammar is crucial in order to enable students to use grammar structures correctly in writing and speaking. In fact, Vivi said that she was teaching grammars both in declarative and procedural knowledge and assessed her students' grammar in

communicative activities to employ students' skill and ability to use English. The students already possessed the knowledge and the ability to use the grammar item in speech, writing and listening and reading comprehension. Although both teachers said that students may not need to be able to explain grammar rules explicitly, they agreed that if they have the ability to apply these rules and structures correctly in sentences, it would translate into fewer grammatical errors in their speech and in writing. Furthermore, Yunita said that she would not hesitate to directly re-teach a grammar structure if she discovered that her students had not fully understood the structure and were not able to use it correctly in speech and writing.

## 5 DISCUSSION

There are a number of possible reasons for some of these include time factors, and teachers' reverence for traditional grammar instruction. Based on the finding of this research, it is proved that the implementation of assessing grammar by employing communicative activities is one of appropriate to teach grammar as declarative and procedural knowledge in grammar and gives beneficial contribution in improving students' understanding in grammar however it has some of the divergences noted above between stated beliefs and actual classroom activities. For example, time is possibly one of the major external factors over which teachers have little or no control and that appears to affect the implementation of assessing grammar in communicative activities, especially in the context of the Indonesia education system. Both Vivi and Yunita constantly spoke about how their teaching was constrained by "time factors." They both suggested that many of their classroom instructional decisions, such as what approach to adopt for a grammar item or structure, were influenced not only by their beliefs but also by the time they perceived they would have to complete an activity as outlined in the syllabus. For example, Vivi said that she specifically preferred both declarative and procedural knowledge rather than only one of them, declarative knowledge or procedural knowledge to teaching grammar, "not because of a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of the latter, but because I believe that that assessing students' grammar in both declarative and procedural knowledge are more straightforward" and therefore her students get completely grammar knowledge both patterns and apply them in communicative activities. They also noted that the demand on their time came not only from the syllabus demands but also the additional duration of the grammar lecturing.

Another significant reason why the lecturers, who may express enthusiasm for

alternative methods of grammar instruction, but continue to employ both declarative (focusing on pattern drills) and procedural knowledge (focusing on how grammar used in communicative activities) Teaching grammar in communicative activities is one of techniques which is much more effective than teaching grammar as a separate subject or as in conventional one. But firstly we should give the concept, the pattern of the grammar and some practices or exercises in drills. Then we have students apply in their writing. Weaver (1996) emphasizes that

There are no miracles here. That is teaching grammar in the context of writing will not automatically mean that once taught, the concept will be learned and applied forever after. On the contrary, grammatical concept must often be taught and re taught to individuals as to groups or classes and students continued to need guidance in actually applying what they have.

The two lecturers reported on in this case study that the assessment of grammatical ability has taken an interesting turn in certain situations. Grammatical ability has been assessed in the context of language use under the rubric of testing speaking or writing. This has led, in some cases, to examinations in which grammatical knowledge is no longer included as a separate and explicit component of communicative language ability in the form of a separate subtest. In other words, the students' declarative and procedural knowledge of grammar alongside other components of communicative language ability (e.g., topic, organization, register) is measured.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This exploratory case study investigated the stated beliefs and actual instructional practices of two experienced lecturers of English language Department Cololege in Indonesia. The finding suggest that lecturers do indeed have a set of belief on assessing grammar to employ students' skill and ability to use English. With respect to the construct of grammatical depicted to measure knowledge of a wide range of grammatical forms as declarative knowledge knowledge and meanings as procedural knowledge Also, with grammatical ability being measured by two selected- task in writing and in the speaking, it is safe to say that assessing grammar by implementing declarative and procedural knowledge provides a broad sampling of the domain of grammatical ability, and it can develop their skills to use English.

Even though generalizations of this case study may be problematic, language lecturer may learn much about the importance of assessing students' understanding grammar and comparing

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these beliefs with actual classroom practices. I also hope that this case study can act as a catalyst in enabling other lecturers to reflect on and examine their own beliefs about their assessing in grammar teaching practices.

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