

THE IMPACTS OF GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE TOWARDS STUDENTS' SPEAKING PROFICIENCY IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This investigation is conducted standing on the gap that there are students of English who are good in speaking the target language but do not master the grammar well, and there are also found students who have adequate grammatical awareness but cannot express themselves orally. This study aims at identifying common grammatical errors occur while students are speaking and how students' grammar ability influences their speaking performance. This study was conducted in a Basic Speaking Class of First Year English Department Students of UIN Ar-Raniry. The Students' grammatical mastery was tested as well as examining their speaking proficiency in order to discover the impact that the grammar has over the speaking. Two teachers of speaking were also interviewed in order to verify a number of supportive information. The result of the study showed that "subject-verb agreement" (SVA) was the most frequent grammatical error occurred in students' speaking practice. It was also admitted that grammatical issue has not a big deal in determining students' ability to speak English.

Keywords: Grammatical Error, Influence And Speaking Performance

INTRODUCTION

The way people talk affects others' opinions about the speakers (Slutsky & Aun: 2008). The attitude of a person could be examined through exploring the manner of his/her speaking. Not only adults could judge children's opinion by watching their way of talking, but also youngsters could make an assumption of adults' view by listening of what they talk about. Students for example, will not always trust and obey to their teachers' advices; it depends greatly on the teachers' ability to persuade the students. A company also should be able to create good attitude of speaking in order to attract their clients' interest. Thus, speaking ability has a huge impact in the sustainability of people's lives.

There are a number of consideration needs controlling to facilitate an adequate speaking ability. One of it is grammatical mastery. An English student would not be able to construct a sentence if he does not understand the grammar of English. Even if he has a great amount of vocabulary mastery, the student would not know the direction of using those words into meaningful language unless he is familiar with the grammar. However, it

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is found that there are a number of people who could speak English fluently and meaningfully but they do not exactly understand the grammar. On the other hand, there are also a number of people who are well-dressed at grammar mastery but they do not speak English smoothly. Based on this gap, the writer therefore is interested in investigating the contribution of grammar mastery toward students' speaking ability. This study aims to meet below research questions:

1. How does grammatical mastery influence students' speaking proficiency?
2. What are common grammatical errors found in students' speaking practice?
3. What are other related problems that the students face whilst speaking?

Students of English Department of State Institute of Islamic Studies (UIN) Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh are obliged to enroll in both Speaking and Grammar class of English. They have to pass these courses as well as a number of other obligatory subjects in order to graduate from the department. Even first year students are enrolled in both classes. This shows that grammar and speaking ability take a big part in facilitating students to be proficient in English. Nevertheless, how both courses interact each other becomes a question. Therefore, this study will be conducted in a Basic Speaking Class of First Year English Students of UIN Ar-Raniry. The Students' grammatical mastery will be tested as well as examining their speaking proficiency in order to discover the impact that the grammar has over the speaking.

The Concept of Speaking Ability

Speaking is not just simply producing sound of words. According to Harmer (2007), a fluent English speaker has to be able to correctly pronounce the phonemes, use the appropriate word stress and intonation, and speak in connected speech. More than that, he added, the capability of speaking is also measured through the ability to speak in a range of various genres and situations.

There are a number of factors that influence students' ability in speaking; one of them is grammatical competence. As suggested by Hervina (n.d.) that students tend to produce grammar errors whilst speaking a certain language. Saville - Troike (2006) also believed that even the most intelligent adult native speaker of English could not master all potential aspects of the language. So, it is unrealistic to expect an English student to produce the target language without errors.

A research by Ting, Mahidir and Chang (2010) found two fundamental grammar errors occurred in the students' speaking performance: affirmative sentence structures were often used to ask questions and base form of verb frequently replaced the past tense form. Arnold

as cited in Aries, Apriliaswati and Wardah (n.d.) suggests more practices in vocabulary and sentence structure would help students solve their communicative problems. Thus, the teacher of English should not deny grammar errors produced in students' speaking performance otherwise their conversational skills would not improve.

Grammatical Competence

The ability of someone to construct sentences is always essential in both oral and written communication. Soraya (2012) proposed that the expertise of a target language could be achieved through adequate grammatical competence. Similarly to speaking performance, a number of factors may affect someone's grammatical awareness in many ways. Different languages are expressed and structured in different way (Saville - Troike (2006). Subject and predicate are terms of a sentence in all languages, but how they are constructed may vary across languages. This fact probably is the central reason why students face difficulties in constructing sentences of a foreign language. In fact, the structure of their mother tongue and the language being learned is different. Teachers of English, therefore, are challenged to well facilitate their students in order to minimize the errors produced while practicing the target language.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

Both quantitative and qualitative data are mixed to meet the research questions designed for this research (Nagy, S.: 2010). The numeric data gained from testing students' grammatical and speaking proficiency are shown in tables. The results of interviewing teachers of speaking are demonstrated in words. Finding out the correlation between grammatical awareness and speaking proficiency, this research is designed as correlative study. "The main purpose of a correlational study is to determine relationships between variables, and if a relationship exists, to determine a regression equation that could be used make predictions to a population" (Simon, M. K., & Goes, J.: 2011). This type of research design works by comparing two variables in order to find the relationship between them (Arikunto, 2006).

This study is planned to meet its aims through testing participants as well as interviewing several teachers of speaking subject. The tests include both speaking and grammar test, and the interview aims at addressing several essential questions to the teachers regarding the subject of this investigation. For more details, below are brief elaborations on how the research will be accomplished.

Participants

This research will be conducted at English Department of UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. The first year students who are enrolled in “basic speaking” class were the participants of this study. There are 34 students in the classroom; ranging from 18 to 20 years old of age. Two teachers of English who have taught speaking subject for more than two years were also interviewed to confirm a number of issues of this study.

Data Collection and Analysis

The instruments used in collecting the data were test (both speaking and grammar test) and interview. The students were firstly assigned to speak about certain topics for two to three minutes in English. This activity was recorded in order to ease the process of data analysis. After that the grammar test was also conducted to evaluate whether the students’ performance in speaking is being affected by their grammatical mastery. Furthermore, a number of issues regarding this study were confirmed to experienced speaking teachers. It is essential to identify common obstacles happened in speaking classroom, whether students’ grammatical awareness has a big deal in developing their speaking performances, and how the teachers maintain problems during their teaching speaking. Thus, two teachers who have taught speaking for several years were interviewed to address those questions. By interviewing the teachers, it is hoped that they could freely express their personal views, perception and interpretation (Bhamani, n.d.) about problems in speaking and grammatical competence. Hence, those are amongst the essential data needed to support this study. Obtaining the data in hand, the researcher afterward analyzes the data and draws conclusions.

The collected data is going to be presented, analyzed, described and interpreted. The raw data will firstly be displayed using tables according to the categories. Then, the process of analyzing the data is run by describing prominent information demonstrated in tables. Finally, the data is interpreted in accordance with the research questions and the research aims which are drawn at the beginning of the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

A grammar test was carried out in order to measure students’ understanding about grammar. There were only two aspects of grammar included in the test: subject verb agreement (SVA) and gerund and infinitive (GI). Twenty questions were assigned in the test, with 13 questions for SVA and 7 questions for GI. It is designed that way because SVA was

considered as the most frequent errors in students' speaking activities. Below are the results of the test.

Table 1. The Results of Grammar Test

No.	Name	Number of Errors		Total Errors	Scores
		SVA	GI		
1.	Putroe Balqis	9	6	15	25
2.	Rizki Rahmayanti	8	5	13	35
3.	Nurul Iman	10	6	16	20
4.	Intan Juwita	9	2	11	45
5.	Rianda Juffa Khalya	9	4	13	35
6.	Marlinda Ulfi	10	2	12	40
7.	Rizka Ramadhan	9	4	13	35
8.	Agha Zhafir Mubarak	7	2	9	55
9.	Jauharsyah	3	1	4	80
10.	Diah Aprilisia	7	5	12	40
11.	M. Anggrian Farhan	8	2	10	50
12.	Nanda Aulia	8	3	11	45
13.	Khairil Maburur	8	3	11	45
14.	Ulul Azmi	5	3	8	60
15.	Hasanatul Maulida	7	1	8	60
16.	Nabila Atika Anwar	5	1	6	70
17.	Dara Nisrina	7	3	10	50
18.	M. Aiyuhal Saputra	7	2	9	55
19.	Wanda Nuzul Ilmi	7	3	10	50
20.	Rizkia Maudina	12	4	16	20
21.	Alya Maulida	8	2	10	50
22.	Arjuna	10	2	12	40
23.	Shahnaz Alisa Erian	5	1	6	70
24.	Failasufa Azka	5	0	5	75
25.	Alsya Putri Aufari	3	1	4	80
26.	Miftahul Jannah	8	5	13	35
27.	Afrasyaru Jolen Lestari	7	5	12	40
28.	Dita Aldila Aqsa	6	2	8	60
29.	Rauzatul Munawwarah	7	6	13	35
30.	M. Fauzan Azmi	5	0	5	75
31.	Rafiqa Khaira	1	3	4	80
32.	Putri Safira Mustaqima	4	5	9	55
33.	Ratri Wulandari	3	1	4	80

Out of 33 students, the table shows that there were only four of them (12%) can be categorized to have good grammatical awareness. 55% of the students have worst ability in grammar; they got the score of 50 and below. While the rest 33% stay on the medium level of grammatical fluency. This fact implies more than half of the students are unaware of grammar, which in turn describe the poorness of grammatical mastery exists among English Department Students itself.

After being tested for their grammatical awareness, the students were also measured their speaking proficiency by allocating them to speak for about five minutes with a given topic. They were given time to prepare in order to allow them generate ideas and minimize errors whilst speaking. Below are the results of the speaking test.

Table 2. The Result of Speaking Test

No.	Name	Scores
1.	Putroe Balqis	80
2.	Rizki Rahmayanti	75
3.	Nurul Iman	70
4.	Intan Juwita	75
5.	Rianda Juffa Khalya	75
6.	Marlinda Ulfi	70
7.	Rizka Ramadhan	70
8.	Agha Zhafir Mubarak	75
9.	Jauharsyah	70
10.	Diah Aprilisia	70
11.	M. Anggrian Farhan	70
12.	Nanda Auliya	75
13.	Khairil Mabror	70
14.	Ulul Azmi	70
15.	Hasanatul Maulida	75
16.	Nabila Atika Anwar	70
17.	Dara Nisrina	70
18.	M. Aiyuhal Saputra	70
19.	Wanda Nuzul Ilmi	70
20.	Rizkia Maudina	70
21.	Alya Maulida	75
22.	Arjuna	75
23.	Shahnaz Alisya Erian	80
24.	Failasufa Azka	75
25.	Elsya Putri Aufari	70
26.	Miftahul Jannah	70
27.	Afrasyaru Jolen Lestari	70
28.	Dita Aldila Aqsa	70
29.	Rauzatul Munawwarah	75
30.	M. Fauzan Azmi Arzaki	75
31.	Rafiqa Khaira	70
32.	Putri Safira Mustaqima	75
33.	Ratri Wulandari	70

The prominent score appears in the table above is 70, which is the lowest indeed. 58% of the students got this fewest score. 36% of them gained the middle position of 75, and the rest 6% reached the best score of 80. Being at the top score, the students spoke fluent English with a few grammatical errors, which do not interfere the meaning of the sentences

spoken. Those who are at the middle level spoke English with more grammatical errors and difficulties in making good sentences. Paying attention to the lowest level students, I needed to listen carefully to what they were saying because grammatical errors and a number of pauses often appeared during their talk. Nevertheless, the sentences that they spoke are still understandable.

If we look at both tables, it is revealed that the highest score of both tests is 80. Out of thirty three students, only four of them got 80 in grammar test and two students in speaking test. It is surprising that one of the students who got top score in speaking but perform unwell in grammar test, with only five correct answers out of twenty questions given. The average score of the grammar test is 51, while the speaking score gain an average of 72. This fact confirms that the students' speaking proficiency is above their grammatical competence.

After conducting grammar and speaking test, interviews with two experienced teachers of speaking were also held to facilitate a number of issues needed. Below are the results of the interviews.

Table 3. The Results of the Interview

No.	Questions	Responses	
		Teacher A	Teacher B
1.	How long have you been teaching speaking?	2 years	9 years
2.	What are problems that you often face whilst teaching speaking?	Lack of motivation to speak, and difficult to generate ideas	I found active and passive students
3.	What are common grammatical errors produced by your students?	SVA: 's' ending is the most	SVA, Word Order
4.	What do you think of the impacts of students' grammatical competences towards their speaking ability?	Not necessarily understanding the whole grammar to be able to speak English. But if you want to speak English well, you need to understand the grammar well. Yes, grammar is an important element for students to be able to speak.	Those who do not master grammatical aspects well will not be able to be good speakers of English. Daily casual conversation does not expect 100% grammatically correct. But, the basic knowledge of grammar should be mastered.
5.	How do you manage to reduce the occurrences of grammatical errors in students' speaking practice?	Time to prepare, medias (pictures), teaching grammar after students' speaking practice session	Give feedbacks after students' speaking session.

Even though the teachers have different length of experience in teaching speaking subject, both confirmed that they are professional qualified teachers of speaking. They have gone through teaching various types of students at different levels of diverse universities in Banda Aceh. Being asked the frequent problems that they often faced during teaching speaking, they came up with different issues; one of the teachers mentioned about lack of motivation and the struggles of students in generating ideas, whilst the other teacher stated about finding active and passive students in class. It is important to notice that none of the teachers verified about grammatical issue as a matter in students' speaking practice. Then, in reply to question number four, both validated that it is possible for students to speak English without knowing much about grammar, especially in daily casual conversation. Although they could not neglect the essentials of grammar in students' speaking, they seemed to believe that grammar could not be treated as a big issue in addressing students to speak English well. They raised the internal factors, such as motivation, difficulties in generating ideas and there are active and passive students, as bigger issues to be tackled whilst practicing students to speak.

Responding to question number three about common grammatical errors transpired during speaking practice, the teachers confirmed that SVA is the most frequent errors produced by students whilst speaking. This fact is not surprising, yet remained as the major problem of grammar found in either speaking or writing products of students. One of the teachers though mentioned "word order" as another familiar error, but SVA is as the top of it.

Discussion

O'Grady (2010) assumed, "learners, instead of thinking solely in terms of formal rules of how to generate sentences could be instructed to think in terms of the realizations of target states which satisfy communicative needs" (p. 207). This statement renders us as English teachers to realize that making students be able to satisfy in communication, or making them learn to mean the language is more critical than instructing them the rules of constructing sentences. O'Grady mentioned about "target states" which he means as the destination circumstances that one desires to achieve at the end of uttering sentences. It can also be defined as what one wishes his/her listener to understand after listening to him/her. Thus, English teachers should move from demanding students to create correct grammatical sentences to making them produce correct yet meaningful sentences.

Harmer (2007) similarly added that grammar can be taught in many different ways, one of them is by correcting students' grammatical errors presenting unexpectedly during other lessons. For example, when students are speaking, then they make grammar mistakes, and the teachers should correct the mistakes and teach about the correct grammar rules of them.

Ting, Mahadhir and Chang (2010) found that SVA was one of common grammatical errors produced by students of university level in speaking English. Fadhilla (2013) similarly encountered that SVA as the highest percentage of grammatical errors made by students of English Department of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. These facts support the data gained through this study that SVA is the most frequent grammatical errors arisen in the students' speaking English. In consequence, English teachers should be aware of this fact and find a solution on how to reduce the number of errors made by students in speaking practice.

Another issue arisen here is that it is essential for students to balance their capacity either in speaking or in understanding grammar. The result of the study revealed that the majority of the students are better at speaking than understanding grammar. In fact, they were exposed to both speaking and grammar subjects equally intensive as they are English Department students. They have two credit hours per week for each subject every semester. Thus, to be able to speak can be assumed easier than to understand grammar. Therefore, grammar needs more emphasis in teaching English as a foreign language.

Even though they can speak English fluently; the listeners can easily understand what they speak, the quality of the sentences spoken are doubted. They might have good vocabulary mastery which makes them speak easily, but they have problem in constructing grammatically correct meaningful sentences. Therefore, further exposures into grammar awareness as well as raising the alertness of communicative need are critical to make the students speak more academically and more meaningful.

The overall generalization that can be seen through the results of the tests is that the majority of the students have poor grammatical awareness compared to their speaking proficiency. It is found that six students who got 75 and above in speaking test performed badly in understanding grammatical structures. The result of the interview with experienced teachers of speaking also verify that people speak fluent English without knowing much about sentence structure is possible. This fact is in line with what Leong and Masoumeh (2017) proposed that having adequate linguistics skills as the last factors affecting students'

speaking performance. They argued, learners are able to speak easily and effectively with high motivation and less anxiety.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is critical to underline that grammar could not be treated as that big issue in students' practicing speaking. The data showed how a number of students who have poor grammatical awareness performed well in speaking. The emphasis should be put on how to upgrade students' motivation and reduce their anxiety in practicing speaking English. Grammatical awareness, on the other hand, could not be neglected, but it has to be a controlling media for students to be able to speak acceptably in terms of form, and reasonably in terms of meaning. Hence, the students will be able to use the target language appropriately and meaningful to reach their communicative needs.

In addition, 'subject verb agreement' (SVA) has become and remained as the most repeated errors produced by students in speaking practice. The result of the study has shown how both teachers of speaking confirmed it during the interview. As experienced teachers of speaking, they must found SVA as repeated and frequent matters happen among students in practicing speaking of English.

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