APPLYING BERLITZ PREMISE TO TEACH VOCABULARY AND GRAMMAR TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: AN OBSERVATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN EAST JAVA

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ABSTRACT: Some researchers admit that children capitalize on the devices to acquire language. The findings revealed that the devices have been considered important in the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar. Language teachers should respond to this fact wisely. The respond could be in terms of facilitating special conditions when teaching language to children. This article offered teachers the idea of inseparable teaching of vocabulary and grammar to children and what teaching conditions constitute the ideal teaching atmosphere to children. Moreover, to give English teachers adequate information, four things in the basic premise of direct method proposed by Berlitz; (lots of oral interaction, spontaneous use of the language, no translation between first and second language, and little or no analysis of grammar), were discussed. In addition, the application of that premise in a school was observed. The elementary school observed was “SD Laboratorium,” Universitas Negeri Malang, East Java. For English teachers who teach in elementary schools, this article can provide additional information about how to teach vocabulary and grammar to their students. It was found that the premise was well applied in the observed elementary school. In addition, school as institution plays an important role to support English teachers in applying the premise effectively.

Keywords: Berlitz Premises, vocabulary, grammar, children

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary and grammar are language components which can assist someone to have better language performance. When children listen to their parents asking “hungry?” this single word is vocabulary. When the next day, they listen to their parents asking “Are you hungry?” This is a simple sentence in which grammar rule adheres. Later on, when trying to produce first language they acquire, it is initiated by the production of vocabulary and simple sentences. It means that vocabulary and grammar are acquired one after another. In other words, language acquisition is actually the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar.

For children, vocabulary and grammar are not acquired simply by imitating. There is a special ability possessed by human to acquire the language which is called Language Acquisition Devices (Chomsky, cited in Lightbown & Spada, 1993). He and his followers call
it as *Universal Grammar (UG)*. One research study on UG was conducted by Verhagen and Leseman (2016). One of the findings of this research was that verbal short-term memory was a significant predictor of both vocabulary and grammar for both children learning L2 in a naturalistic setting and monolingual children. Responding to that finding, I assume that vocabulary and grammar are important aspects in children second language acquisition which then should be taught appropriately. More importantly, language is basically acquired not learned, but the application of appropriate teaching will give contribution to the acquisition.

It is still debatable about whether the earlier someone learns the language, the better proficiency he or she will obtain. In other words, who learns language better, children or adults? Related to this issue, Carroll (cited in Stern, 1983) stated that

> the data of the present study suggests that the primary factor in attainment of proficiency in French (and presumably, any foreign language) is the amount of instructional time provided. The study provides no clear evidence that there is any special advantage in starting the study of foreign language very early other than the fact that this may provide the students more time to attain a desired performance level at a given age.

From that idea, it can be assumed that learning language since childhood may bring success since more time are available than learning it when adults.

Dealing with this assumption, the issue is about what the subsequent factor contributes second language teaching for children. An important question is whether the ways children acquire first language (L1) will be the same as those in second language (L2). In relation to this question Rachmajanti (2005) stated, “in learning a second language, it appears that concepts that children learn in L1 can be transferred to L2”. This statement implies that second language teaching to children should consider the application of similar condition they possess in their first language acquisition. Ironically, based on the writer’s observation in some elementary schools, it was still found that the premise was not well applied. The following conditions were found: English teachers rarely facilitate students to interact; teachers do not really expose students to practice English; teachers speak L1 (*Bahasa Indonesia*) more than English; and teachers often give long explanation on grammar rule instead of creating a task-based activity.

Concerning the notion that language learning since childhood may benefit children, concepts that children learn in L1 can be transferred to L2 (one of the concepts is the
learning condition). Research finding implies that children capitalize on verbal short-term memory to acquire vocabulary and grammar, and the fact is that the premise was not well applied in some elementary schools.

**METHOD**

In this article, I discuss two things: the ideas of inseparable teaching of vocabulary and grammar to children and the basic premise of the Direct Method suggested by Maximilian Berlitz. The discussion of the premise relates the learning conditions with vocabulary and grammar teaching. Report on the application of the premise in and outside classroom was based on observation and informal interview with two English teachers in “SD Laboratorium” of Universitas Negeri Malang.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings and discussion focus on (1) inseparable teaching of vocabulary and grammar to children and (2) Berlitz premise of the Direct Method which covers four aspects, based on observation and informal interview with two English teachers in the laboratory school.

**Inseparable Teaching of Vocabulary and Grammar to Children**

When introducing new words to children, a teacher should also say a simple phrase or sentence in which the words can be used. For example, when introducing the word *a fan*, the teacher says it first, and then he/she can say *It’s hot* while showing students through body movement that he/she feels hot, then he can continue saying *I want to turn on the fan!* while turning on the fan. The phrases/sentences provided can be clues to stick to children’s understanding about the words being introduced.

Students’ task to memorize some simple words out of the context may be an easy activity. They can just keep the meaning of the words to their mind. However, what is the point of doing this task? Moreover, for a certain period of time, the words they memorize may not stay longer in their mind. Therefore, context presentation can be something valuable for students’ vocabulary acquisition. The words that pertain to context will make students easier to keep them longer in their brain.

**Berlitz’s Premise of the Direct Method**
On his basic premise of the direct method, Berlitz said that foreign language learning should be more like first language learning---lots of oral interaction, spontaneous use of the language, no translation between first and second language, and little or no analysis of grammar. This premise should be applied to English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) learners in all age level, including children. The followings are further discussion about the premise and the application in the “SD Laboratorium” of Universitas Negeri Malang.

Lots of Oral Interaction

Applying Total Physical Response proposed by Asher (cited in Brown & Lee, 2015: 27) to facilitate students; oral interaction can be a good choice. This is a method that is stress-free in which students did much both in listening and acting. For Grade 1 students, this is indeed something enjoyable. The teacher can guide a group of students to ask Close the door!; Open the window!; Move the chair!; or Stand up! then ask another group to give response by doing what are asked. What should be kept in mind when applying oral interaction is that the teacher must be sure that students have sufficed listening the words or sentences which are going to be practiced.

During the class observation in Grade 2 class, the application of lots of oral interaction was seen as follows:

In Classroom Activity

1. The teacher did modeling Do you like Mango? Students responded Yes, I do/No, I don’t. Then, she asked students to ask her Do you like ………?, and she responded Yes, I do/No, I don’t.

2. The teacher facilitated the students to have a question and answer practice with their pair.
   Student 1: Do you like orange? (while showing a picture of orange)
   Student 2: Yes, I do/No, I don’t, Do you like grapes? (while showing a picture of grapes)

3. The teacher asked the students to do “Find someone to know what he/she likes” activity. Students find their ten friends who like five kinds of food and five kinds of drinks by asking each other, then complete the table of favorite food and drink.

Outside Classroom Activity. (Data were obtained through an informal interview)
The teacher encouraged the students to use English when asking students to do something; calling them out; forbidding something, and any other forms of interaction.

*Spontaneous Use of Language*

Language used spontaneously must be language learners’ obsession. Language indeed is about the form to bring meaning. However, For children, too much language forms explained, are not effective. Even though, it is possible for them to be familiar with the form, but then they may just know the language but may not know how to use the language. Therefore, language teachers’ effort on facilitating students’ language used spontaneously is a real must. It may be reached by providing exposure to students. Exposure is when someone experiences something or is affected by it because they are in a particular situation or place (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary, third edition). It means that, in school, children must be in situation which makes them accustomed to use language spontaneously. In other words, school environment, which is believed to influence students’ cognitive skills (Cahyono, B.Y. 2015, p.50) needs language exposures to be provided. For example, teachers can intensively communicate using the language they have taught with the children.

During the class observation in SD Laboratorium Universitas Negeri Malang at second grader class, the applications of premise *Spontaneous use of language* were seen as follows:

**In Classroom Activity**

Teacher explained some classroom languages at glance, and through repetition, the majority students understand that language. During the observation, teacher used the followings classroom language:

- Raise your hands without shouting!
- Can I erase this?
- Would you please not talking!
- Silent! I will count 1 to 3
- May I borrow your metal ruler?

**Outside Classroom Activity.** (data obtained through informal interview).
School holds speaking club activity. Students are divided into two groups. First group are those who are at first to third grader, and second group are those who are at fourth to sixth grader.

*No Translation between First and Second Language*

Translation strategy is often used by language learners when learning a foreign language. It occurs frequently when they are trying to produce phrases or sentences in target language. It is not totally wrong indeed. However, it may cause cross-linguistics interference (Malmkjaer, cited in McCarthy, 2001: 42). The phrases or sentences they produce are only words order in their first language which are not good or common sentence pattern of target language. When the phrases or sentences are understandable, it is fine, otherwise, it may create confusion. The sentence *My body is not delicious* produced by student to tell that *he/she is sick* can be an example of confusing sentence to non Bahasa Indonesia speaker. This sentence is the result of Indonesian learners of English who simply translate Bahasa Indonesia to English without being aware of the context. What teachers should do then is how to increase students’ ability to think in target language by always sticking context to words, phrases, sentences which are taught.

Teacher should be able to avoid that strategy used by children. Students at this age are not expected to understand or produce complex sentences in foreign language. Hence, just tell them the function of certain daily or classroom expressions, provide adequate repetition and exposure to use them, without translating word by word. Those two kinds of expressions should be attained by students at this age. However, for some situations, teachers’ translation of words or sentences are needed. The following situations allow teachers to translate foreign language to students’ first language:

1. When teachers have no choice to make students understand their tasks’ instructions.

   In case the English textbook contains tasks instruction in complex sentences, teachers should simplify them. Even, they must not only say the instruction but also demonstrate it. It is done because children will understand better if teachers give clue to the tasks instruction, like face expressions and body movement (Cahyono, 2015: 50). The last thing teachers can do is giving them examples. When the majority of students still look confused after being given explanation, teachers have no alternative; hence, to translate it, is the best way.
2. When abstract words are introduced like dangerous, they may ask what the meaning of this word is. Firstly, the teacher can show a picture of the house caught on fire, while explaining the word meaning in a simple sentence. When it does not work, then teachers can give another picture while explaining it again. When they still do not get the idea, then translating this word into students’ first language is inevitable.

During the class observation at Grade 2 class, the application of premise No Translation between First and Second Language was seen as follows:

**In Classroom activity**

Teacher was dominant to use English during her teaching. She spoke Bahasa Indonesia only for the following situation:

- To have a little joke with students. For example, she said, “*kok jawabannya happy semua, emang semuanya senang?*” (A”ll your answers are happy, are you really happy?” )

- To emphasize the theories about the topic of her lesson. For example: *She said, “Ciri-ciri count noun itu apa? Kalau count noun bias dihitung apa tidak?* (“What is the characteristics of count noun? If it is count noun, can we count on it?”)

- To explain something to slow learner. For example she said, “kemudian kamu jawab. *Yes itu artinya suka, no itu artinya tidak suka, kemudian gantian.*” The English translation is, “then you answer! *Yes* means “you like it”, *no* means “you don’t like it, then take turn!”

**Little or No Analysis on Grammar**

The teacher should explain only little grammar rule to children. Otherwise, it will not be compatible with the nature of language acquisition. Repeating students’ ungrammatical sentences from *She are a policewoman* into *She is a policewoman* once or twice is better than explaining them about subject-verb agreement.

In Indonesian curriculum today, it is suggested that grammar should not be explicitly explained to students rather than through genre. They are expected to attain grammar understanding by observing sentences. Thus, teaching grammar to children should be task-based. In other words, little explanation or directed activity to grammar rule is better than longer explanation on it. For example, for elementary students Grade 4, before doing the task
on completing sentences with appropriate to be am, are, and is, teacher can ask students to do the following activities:

**Activity 1**
Pay attention to the subject and to be of the sentences in the table! They are paired.
*(Perhatikan subjek dan to be dari kalimat-kalimat di dalam table! Subjek dan to be itu berpasangan.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>to be</th>
<th>Object</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>am</td>
<td>a student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>a student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They</td>
<td>are</td>
<td>students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>Is</td>
<td>a student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She</td>
<td>Is</td>
<td>a student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Activity 2**
Tick (√) for the correct sentences! Pay attention to the subject and to be.
*(Beri tanda centang untuk kalimat yang benar, perhatikan subjek dan to be).*

1. A. I is a student.
   B. I am a student.  √
2. A. We am students.
   B. We are students.
3. A. She are a student.
   B. She is a student.
4. A. You are a student.
   B. you is a student.
5. A. He is a student.
   B. He am a student.
6. A. They are students.
   B. They is students.

**Activity 3**
Complete the following sentences with appropriate to be am, are, or is!
*(Lengkapi kalimat-kalimat berikut dengan to be am, are, atau is yang tepat!)*

1. She ……..a doctor.
2. I ……a carpenter.
3. You ……a farmer.
4. They ……policewomen.
5. We ……football players.
6. He ……a fruit seller.

Activity 1 is a directed activity to grammar rule. Instead of explaining which *to be* *(am, are, and is)* agrees to a certain subject, just ask students to pay attention to the subject and auxiliary *(to be)* of the sentences in the table, then tell them that they are paired. Activity 2 is done to find out whether they were successful or not in doing Activity 1. Don’t change the object student/students, it is to focus them on *subject* and *to be* only. Activity 3 is aimed to increase students’ thinking level. Changing the student/students to midwife, carpenter, farmer, policewomen, football players, or fruit seller is to do repetition on vocabulary they have studied in previous activities, which is an important thing to do when teaching children.

During observation at Grade 2 class, the application of premise *Little or No Analysis on Grammar* was seen as follows:

In Classroom Activity

1. To teach students *Do you like …?* the teacher did not explain much on the rule rather than practiced it much by asking directly to some students.
2. To make sure that students can use *Do you like …?* the teacher asked the students to ask her back. She did not explain how to construct that sentence pattern.

**CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

The way teachers teach a foreign language to children can be either tremendous benefit or loss. When teachers put the premise into teaching practice successfully, then it will be beneficial for students. Otherwise, it will be a great loss. Teachers’ patience is needed in order to be successful in applying the premise. Moreover, to apply those premises effectively needs patience, continuity, and careful thought. School indeed plays significant role. Its support covers facilities, English language teachers development program, and creating foreign language atmospheres. Those three things are interdependent. They completes each other.
REFERENCES


