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THE USE OF DIACHRONIC APPROACH IN TEACHING GRAMMAR IN ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

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Abstract

Learning a language means learning its grammar. Grammar of a language is important to construct a grammatical construction which is prominent for the language. By knowing the grammar, one could avoid making mistakes in producing the linguistic construction of the language. In addition, by mastering the grammar, one is able to speak, write, listen, and read the language well. This also happens to English language. English grammar is prominent, especially for the learners, to make grammatical English constructions.

As one of international languages, English reaches its popularity. Many people study English, formally or informally. Formally, they will enroll to an English department as English department students. As the students of English department, they are intensely exposed to English grammar during their study. They have to take several grammar courses. The aim is to provide the students with sufficient basic knowledge on English grammar so that they are able to be good non-native English speakers (and also writers). Thus, grammar course plays crucial role in developing students' skills in English.

However, most of the time the students are exposed to existing rules without being introduced to the concepts behind the rules. To understand the concepts behind the rules, the lecture must also trace back the structure of English in the ancient time starting from Old English. Studying the old grammar of English is related to diachronic approach. By so doing, the students will get deeper understanding of the grammar. Due to the prominence of diachronic approach, therefore, this paper aims at describing the use of diachronic approach in teaching grammar in English department.

Keywords: *grammar, grammatical construction, diachronic, English, English Department*

Introduction

When someone learns a language, he/she will learn the grammar of the language. To define grammar, there will be some definitions related to the structure of language and the appropriate use of language. However, in this paper—related to the context of teaching—grammar can be defined a set of prescriptions of rules for using language (Weaver, 1996). For non-native speakers of a language, grammar is the rules of the targeted language; while for native speakers the knowledge of grammar is tacit because they are exposed to that language since they were in the early age (Haegeman, 1994:6). Because there are some rules, the language becomes well-ordered and can be used as effective and efficient means of communication.

All languages have their own grammar, so does English. English grammar is the set of rules of English language. There are countless books on English grammar which help the learner (or even the native speaker) to study the rules. By knowing and applying the rules of grammar, one could produce grammatical English construction.

(1) *John new house a builds.

As speaker of English, one could recognize sentence (1) as ungrammatical sentence because it does not follow the rule of grammaticality in English dealing with English word order and the concept of phrase. Meanwhile, as a speaker of English, intuitively one can also find out that the following sentence (1a) is a grammatical sentence. It follows the rule of English word order.

(1a) John builds a new house.

According the previous discussion, it is getting obvious that grammar is prominent in helping the language user and learner to produce grammatical sentence.

Regarding the importance of grammar, people who want to master English must learn the grammar as well. By mastering the grammar, people could read, write, listen, and speak English well because good comprehension on grammar will assist them to produce and understand English constructions. Hence, inevitably, grammar is taught as part of language teaching and learning and it is taught at schools, colleges, universities, and language courses as the dominant part. Nevertheless, this paper would focus on English Department because it is the formal place of studying English in high level of education. Furthermore, English Department is the place where future English teachers are studying at the moment. Thus, it is prominent to pay more attention of the teaching of grammar in this department to produce high quality English teachers.

Grammar taught at school can be categorized into prescriptive grammar which establishes rules for the socially or stylistically correct use of language (Crystal, 2008:217). It is mostly related to synchronic condition of language and of one period of a language, particularly the recent one. If it is English, then the students will learn the grammar of present-day English. As the analysis of language will be more comprehensive by conducting both synchronic and diachronic approach, thus, why do not apply the same approach to language teaching. It is assumed that by delivering diachronic perspective in teaching grammar, students will know more about the language they are studying. The mere use of synchronic approach is considered insufficient to provide the answer of "why" and "how" questions on grammar.

By considering the points above, it is intriguing to know further the use of diachronic approach. Therefore, this paper aims at offering another insight on the teaching of grammar by describing the use of diachronic approach in teaching grammar. The focus on this paper is not how to use the approach, but the background of using the approach, the application of the approach in teaching English grammar by giving some examples and the benefits of applying this approach.

Literature Review

Language study can be dichotomized into synchronic and diachronic studies. Synchronic study of language focuses on the basic units that go to make up the language, namely its phonemes, its morpheme, and so forth (Crowley, 1992). In the meantime, diachronic approach is related to language change because this approach analyzes language by focusing on language over period of time so that it is closely related to language change (Campbell, 1998:4).

There are various ways to study language diachronically (Campbell, 1998). First, historical linguists may study changes in a single language, for instance the changes from Old English to Middle English or from Old English to Modern English. Historical linguists may also study the changes revealed in the comparison of related languages. The results of these diachronic studies can be used in teaching grammar so that English Department students can understand more on the language they are studying and have extra competence as English teachers.

When people discuss diachronic study of language, most of them will relate it to etymology. Even though it is part of diachronic linguistics, the change on language structure over time will be considered more useful to the grammar knowledge of English Department students.

Before going further to discuss the diachronic approach in teaching grammar, this part attempts to introduce diachronic approach or diachronic linguistics. In diachronic linguistics, languages are studied from the point of view of their historical development (Crystal, 2008:142), for example the changes which have taken place between Old English and Modern English. The changes

include sound change (phonological change), morphological and syntactic change (grammatical change), and shift in meaning (semantic change). Over time, the sounds of languages tend to change significantly. Sound changes are usually classified based on whether they happen regularly or sporadically (Campbell, 1998:17). Not only related to sound, language changes also cover language structure which includes morphological and syntactic structure. Besides covering language structure, language changes also happen in the aspect of meaning. The meaning of word tends to shift for a long period of use.

Because this paper focuses on grammatical aspect of language, kinds of diachronic changes that are close to it are morphological and syntactic changes. Morphology and syntax discuss grammatical components and both indeed cannot be separated in the analysis of grammatical aspects of language. Those morphological and syntactic changes will be described in the next part of this paper as the example of application of diachronic approach in teaching grammar.

A. Diachronic Approach in Teaching Grammar in English Department

This part will explain further diachronic approach as part of linguistics in teaching grammar. It encompasses 1) the background, 2) the use of diachronic approach in teaching grammar and 3) the benefits of using diachronic approach in teaching grammar.

1) The Background

Grammar taught at school and linguistics are actually two different things. As previously mentioned, grammar is prescriptive while linguistics is descriptive. However, both can be combined to create a good language classroom if the rationale/background is clear. Thus, this part is going to describe the background of using diachronic approach in teaching grammar.

The term grammar is firmly related to synchronic grammar and the teaching focuses on synchronic aspect of language structure. Synchronic grammar is useful for the communicative use of language in daily life. English Department students who master grammar must be able to be proficient English speakers. As future English teacher, they should know more about the language they mastered. They should know not only the grammar of the language, but also the nature of the grammar of the language. Once the students comprehend the nature of the grammar, it will be easy for them to analyze and explain the reason behind the emergence or the loss of each grammatical unit in the language. Have we ever questioned why English has copula? Why does English have subject-verb agreement? Why does English verb lose its inflection? Why does a certain linguistic unit occur? How if someday one of the future students asks those questions and the teacher cannot explain the reason comprehensively? Hence, it is important to know the reason behind the emergence or the loss of grammatical unit and it can be done by tracing the language in its older version.

Tracing language grammar in ancient time can be done by applying diachronic approach. Diachronic approach in this context is related to historical linguistics which is one of the branches of linguistics. However, it should be emphasized that in this paper diachronic approach is not a method. It is a way to give another point of view related to grammar to the students to answer the question "why are there such linguistic or grammatical unit?" and "how do those units emerge in the language?"

According to diachronic linguist, language is a living thing. It has its development through time so that it is interesting to follow the historical development of language to complete the synchronic knowledge of language. Therefore, by giving diachronic approach in grammar teaching, it is possible for the students to figure out why English has less word order freedom, less inflectional morphology, and less case marking than in German, its sister language. Comprehension on these things will build good understanding on English language they should really know best.

2) The application of diachronic approach in teaching grammar

In this part, there will be some examples of the application of diachronic approach in teaching some elements of English grammar. It includes the teaching of noun phrase, subject-verb agreement, word order, passive construction, and English verb.

a) Noun Phrase

Noun phrase can be defined as phrase whose head is a noun (Greenbaum and Nelson, 2002: 47).

In teaching phrase, teacher will show the students which is the head and the modifier of the phrase since head and modifier are the main concepts of phrase. The following sentences consist of noun phrases (italicized).

(2) I read *linguistics book*.
(3) John is *a smart student*.

Those noun phrases are the examples taken from Present-day English. The heads of the noun phrases above are *book* and *student* respectively.

In studying noun phrase, the main focus is definitely the noun. Do the students know the nature of noun in English? Is the noun of Present-day English (and also Modern English) different from that of Old English? Yes, it is. In Old English, there were many noun inflections. Each case of the noun (nominative, accusative, genitive, or dative) and different number (singular or plural) would result in different inflections for the noun (Payne, 2011:28). Besides, Old English noun had inflectional affixes to mark gender (masculine, feminine, and neuter) as in German (Poedjosoedarmo, 2008; Payne, 2011). English started to lose its noun inflection in Early Middle English when there are contacts with other communities speaking different languages (Payne, 2011:28).

By teaching or learning the historical development of noun phrase, students will comprehend that actually English had the same noun as its sister languages (German or French). The students are able to explain "why does English noun phrase different from other related language?" However, this is merely an example of the application in teaching noun phrase. The teacher can explore more the diachronic perspective on noun phrase in order to facilitate the students with more knowledge.

b) Word Order

Each language has its own word order to construct grammatical construction. Greenberg via Comrie (1981) classified languages in the world based on its word order, namely Subject-Verb-Object (SVO), Subject-Object-Verb (SOV), Object-Verb-Subject (OVS) and Object-Subject-Verb (OSV). English is included as SOV language as exemplified by the following sentences.

(4) John studies English.
(5) Mary meets her old friend in the library.

Students of English language know the pattern of English sentence and they know that the position of the constituent of the sentence cannot be changed. In addition, the grammar teacher will explain the pattern and how to construct sentences based on the pattern. Nevertheless, the students are not familiar with the concept of English sentence. Why does English have SVO word order? Why not SOV or OSV? What is the reason behind the rule of SVO? The diachronic approach will give the answer.

English was once known as language with free word order. Comrie (1981) stated that free word order language means the language does not have basic word order. Old English had no basic word order because there were SVO and SOV as word orders in Old English with SOV as the most dominant one (Trips, 2002:37). But, why Old English has both word orders. Actually this is related to the noun of Old English. As previously explained, noun in Old English had inflections to mark cases. By having this marker, the noun would have clear function. One could recognize whether the noun

was the subject or the object from the case markers. Therefore, Old English sentence was relatively free.

(6) ... *Þæt he his stefne up ahof.*
that his voice up lifted.
'... that he lifted up his voice'

(7) ... *Þæt he ahof upp Þa earcan.*
that he lifted up the chest
'... that he lifted up the chest'

Nevertheless, the condition is different from today. When English started to lose its inflections, the function of the noun could not be distinguished based on the case markers (Poedjosoedarmo, 2008). The speaker of English had to place the noun in its own order; subject is in the first position and object is placed after the verb to form a grammatical sentence. It is different from, for instance, Japanese. Japanese language has SOV word order since it has the markers for the noun to indicate whether the noun is the subject, object or complement.

(8) *Watashi wa Shabu-Shabu o tabemasu.*

wa is subject marker for *watashi* and *o* object marker of *Shabu-Shabu* in sentence (8). Having subject and object markers, Japanese does not need to have SVO word order.

By understanding this, the students of grammar will be able to explain why English (Present-day English) sentence has SVO word order.

c) Subject-Verb Agreement

In learning English grammar, one of the main topics is agreement. In English, third person singular subject will cause the verb having overt inflection while other kinds of subject will not.

(9) Mark *drives* the car carefully.
(10) I *drive* the car carefully.

At the very beginning, Indonesian students will find this difficult since Indonesian language does not possess this system.

(11) *Dia makan nasi goreng dengan lahap.*
(12) *Mereka makan nasi goreng dengan lahap.*

However, students who learn English intensively will have their intuition on this grammatical aspect. Unfortunately, most of the students cannot explain why English has subject-verb agreement since they only know the rule, but not the concept behind it.

How if we see subject-verb agreement diachronically? It is already found the concept of agreement in Old English since Old English had inflections for the verb (verb paradigm) as well. Quirk and Wrenn (1060:74) stated that subject-verb agreement in Old English included person, number, gender, and case. Agreement can also be found in other Indo-European languages. Here are the examples taken from French.

(13) *Je travaille.* 'saya bekerja.'
(14) *Ils travaillent.* 'mereka bekerja.'

Subject *je* dan *ils* consists of categorical information such as (13) first person singular and (14) third person plural. This categorical information triggers different inflection for the verb *travailler* (Oktavianti, 2013) that is *travailler* and *travaillent* for the subject *je* and *ils* respectively.

Diachronically, agreement is a common feature being inherited from proto-Indo-European to the descendants of proto-Indo-European, including English, French, German, Italy, and so forth. Thus, it can be said that Indo-European languages have agreement as part of their characteristics.

d) English tenses

Tense is one of the most dominant topics in English grammar. Grammar teachers introduce types of tenses in English and then the students usually memorize them all and how to use it.

(15)John *went* to Florida to visit his grandma last week.

(16)They *are studying* linguistics together.

Students who are drilled intensively are possible to have native-like intuition on tenses. Similarly to subject-verb agreement, they will naturally know when they have to use simple present or present progressive tense in certain circumstance.

Nevertheless, this is merely associated with the ability of production. The students cannot explain why English has tense when someone ask them that question. It is because their grammar teacher does not give them enough diachronic background on tenses.

As grammatical component will gradually fade away when it is no longer needed in grammatical system, only the needed element will remain stable in the system. This happens to tense. According to Poedjosoedarmo (2008), though inflections of case markers have faded away, the inflection indicating tense still exist until today. It is due to the function of tense. English language still needs its tense to indicate the time of the action. In addition, English tense is important to mark the identity of the verb. Without having tense inflection, English verb will look like adjective or noun. By understanding this, students can answer "why English has tense inflection?"

e) Teach English verb

Verb is a central component of a sentence. According to Chafe (1970), verb will determine the constituent that precedes and follows it. English verb is important as well. Levin and Rappaport-Hovav (2005:8) stated that English verb will select its constituents semantically or it is called as semantic selection. However, it is not appropriate to discuss semantic selection in this paper because the main focus is on grammar.

Nowadays, students will describe English verb as having its regular and irregular verb. In addition, verb can be inflected by tenses to indicate the time of the action. Moreover, English verb are agreed with its subject and there is inflection to mark the agreement. Nevertheless, to know the nature of English verb, the students must know its historical development starting from Old English. Because inflection faded away in the early period of Middle English, so did the verb inflection. In Old English, the verbs were very compact because they had many inflections. These verbs were called strong verbs. Strong verb is one of the main characteristics of Indo-European language (Baugh and Cable, 1978:59—61). By having many inflections, these verbs only modified its root vowel to indicate tense. Since language change is related to more economic form, verb inflection also faded away. The verb was no longer compact because the use of inflection declined. These verbs are called as weak verbs that need inflection to mark its tenses (Baugh and Cable, 1978: 59—61). Though the inflection declined, there is small number of strong verbs in Present-day English. Therefore, in forming questions or negation in Old English, the speaker did not need the help of "dummy" *do* because the verb was compact so it can be moved easily. However, in Modern English and Present-day English, we need "dummy" *do* to form question or negation due to the loss of inflections of the verb (Poedjosoedarmo, 2008). By knowing the historical development of the verb, students are able to find out the nature of English verb and answer the question "why" on English verb.

3) The benefits of using diachronic approach in teaching grammar

After describing the application of diachronic in teaching grammatical aspects of English, it is also important to depict the benefits of using the approach so that grammar teacher will consider this approach useful. Some benefits that students can take are as follow:

a) Students will understand the nature of language

By giving diachronic approach in teaching grammar, students will understand the nature of language. One of the natures of language is the change for language is not a static thing. It drifts based on the factors that affect and the change lasts over time. According to Keller (2005:7), language lives because it "grows", "alters", and "die". As long as it lives, it will grow and alter. Only dying language cannot undergo the steps.

In studying the historical development of grammatical units, the students are able to see that those grammatical components change over time. Thus, they will not consider language change as something negative, but it is natural thing in language.

b) Students will learn that language change is the economic change.

Another benefit of using diachronic approach is the student will see that the changes happen in language are related to economy. Loss of inflection in noun and verb is one of the proofs of language economization. Another example is the change of lexical verb into functional verb. Campbell (1998:238) stated that lexical verb *will* has changed from lexical verb into functional verb. In Old English, for example, the speaker can produce

(17)I will to ...

But, in Present-day English, the speaker has to combine *will* with main verb since will is not a lexical verb.

(18)I will drink orange juice.

Another example of more economic form of language is the change of lexical verb into functional verb (copula). Lohndal via van Gelderen (2009:229) mentioned that some lexical verbs changed into copula. The clearest example is the verb *wes* (to remain, to stay) was an English lexical verb which possessed certain features. However, it changed into copula *was* which loses its features and merely indicates past tense.

c) Students will understand the nature of grammatical components

Students will learn the history of English language, not only the event, but also the historical development of the language structure. They will find out that each grammatical unit is related to each other. The emergence of one unit is due to the loss of another one. For example, the word order is related to the presence of case marker. When there are case markers, the words do not need to have certain order to construct grammatical construction of a language. But, when there are no case markers, the language is becoming rigid in its word order.

Another example is the loss of verb inflection that influences the emergence of *do* in forming question or negation sentence. In Old English, the speaker did not need to use *do* because the verb was compact so that it can be moved easily. Therefore, the shift or the loss of a grammatical component will influence the emergence of another grammatical component.

d) Students will know the concept of proto-language, mother language, sister language, and daughter language.

Talking about historical development of language means get to know the ancestor of the language. If it is English, then the students will also learn the ancestor of English which is Germanic language (Old German). However, this Germanic language has its ancestor as well. It is Proto-Indo-European (PIE). Proto-language is the oldest version of languages derived from it which no longer exist so PIE is the oldest version of Indo-European languages. Thus, Germanic language is the mother language (not mother tongue) of English and PIE is the proto-language of English. As an insight, Indonesian language also has its mother and proto-language. The mother language is Malay and its proto language is Proto-Austronesia (PAN).

Besides having proto-language and mother language, every language in this world has sister and daughter language as well. English is said to be the daughter language of Germanic language and

its sister languages are Modern German, French, and Italian since they are all derived from the common ancestor (PIE). Therefore, it is not weird if these languages are similar to some extent because they all go back to a common ancestor.

Without tracing the historical development of English, students of English Department will never know the family tree of the language. Though for some people it is not quite crucial, however, as English teachers they should know the language very well.

B. Conclusion

In conclusion, based on the previous discussion, grammar is quite prominent in the mastery of a language, especially for those who will be future English teachers. By conducting diachronic approach, it will give some benefits to the students. This also requires extra efforts of the grammar teacher. The teacher cannot only focus on the (Present-day English or synchronic) grammar books, they must also read a lot of diachronic studies related to the grammar of English. By so doing, teacher will be ready to deliver topics on historical development of the language and the students can take benefit of it. However, this paper has some shortcomings because there are no explanations yet on how to use it in the language classroom, especially in grammar class. Thus, it is expected to be completed by another researcher or writer in the future for the improvement of this paper.

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