

Important Aspect In Learning English As A Foreign Language

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini dipersiapkan untuk mempelajari dan memahami 2 (dua) aspek penting dalam mempelajari Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing. Beberapa aspek tersebut yaitu aspek bahasa dan budaya. Aspek bahasa terdiri dari semua hal yang akan dipelajari dan menggunakan hal-hal yang berkaitan dengannya (berdasarkan tata bahasa), bagaimanapun aspek budaya terdiri dari semua aspek yang membuat bahasa (inggris) untuk digunakan di negara asal.

Kata Kunci : bahasa asing, aspek linguistic, aspek budaya, proses pembelajaran.

ABSTRACT

This article is prepared for learning and understanding two important aspects in order to learn English as a foreign language. Those aspects are the language and the culture. The language aspect consist of all of the things that have to be learnt in order to use it accordingly (based on grammar), however the culture aspect consist of all aspects that building up the language (english) to use it properly according to the country origin.

Keywords: foreign language, linguistic aspect, culture aspect, learning process.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of English as one of the most widely used languages in global communication era is thoroughly unquestionable. Almost every country around the globe learns the language either as a second language or as a foreign language. In Indonesia English is taught and learned as the first important foreign language. For that purpose, it is now even introduced as one important subject in the elementary school's curriculum.

According to Bachman (1990), language ability involves two components: language competence and strategic competence. Note that Bachman (1990) call the language competence as language knowledge. Language competence comprises organizational competence and the pragmatic competence as its two major components. The organizational competence comprises grammatical competence (knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology/graphology) and textual competence (knowledge of cohesion, rhetorical organization). The pragmatic competence comprises illocutionary competence or functional knowledge and sociolinguistic competence/knowledge. Functional knowledge includes knowledge of ideational functions, manipulative functions (instrumental functions, regulatory functions, interpersonal functions), heuristic functions, and imaginative functions. Sociolinguistic competence includes sensitivity to dialects, sensitivity to registers, sensitivity to naturalness, sensitivity to cultural referents and figures of speech.

The language competence and strategic competence are involved in the verbal communication process. This competence includes verbal and non-verbal strategies needed to mend communication breakdown due to lack of competency or limited performance and to improve the rhetorical effect of the utterance (Canale, 1983: 339).

Verbal communication involves the production of utterances, consisting of two stages: planning and execution. The planning stage comprises communicative target and planning process resulting in a plan.

Communicative target consists of the following elements: (1) actional elements, related to speech act, (2) mode elements concerned with intercommunicator role relations, and (3) propositional elements, related to the content of the communicative event (Faer and Kasper, 1983, as cited by Bachman, 1990: 100). Planning is in fact the interaction of the following three components: communicative target, communicative source available for the individual concerned, and the assessment of the communicative target. The execution stage involves neurological and psychological processes, as the execution of the plan, resulting in language use. The planning stage involves the recall of relevant points (grammatical, textual illocutionary, sociolinguistic) from language competence and formulate the plan of which the execution is expected to reach the communicative goal.

Due to the fact that learning English as a foreign language is not similar to learning our first language, useful strategies which primarily focus on its use as a means of communication are crucial and unavoidable in order to facilitate as well as accelerate its learning and transferring processes. Such strategies should be able to encourage learners to speak. In relation to this, two major important aspects in learning English as a foreign language will be discussed. The first aspect, called linguistic aspects, concerns elements that are important to know and learn within the language *per se* and the second aspect, known as cultural aspects, is related to elements beyond the language.

MEAN TOPIC

Linguistic Aspects

Linguistic aspects mean all the elements that are necessary to know and to learn within a language. They cover vocabulary, grammar, reading, listening, speaking, and writing. These elements are to be integrated in language learning.

The term integrated foreign language learning is a method that tries to integrate all the linguistic elements into one learning activity. The method allows learners to learn the linguistic elements in an integrated manner. For example, in learning reading, they can also learn vocabulary, grammar, listening, speaking, and writing at a time. This, for instance, can be done by reading a text. If difficult words are encountered, learners can look them up in a dictionary; it means they learn vocabulary. During their reading, some complex sentence constructions may also be found. Through this activity, they can learn the patterns of the phrases and the correct usage of tenses. Speaking activities can be performed by trying to orally retell the contents of the text with either their own words or the words found in the text, while writing can be practiced by expressing the topic of the text on a piece of paper using their own words and sentences.

Reading aloud can also help learners pronounce words correctly. If they do not know the correct pronunciation of a word, a dictionary with pronunciation transcripts can be of help. In this case, a good dictionary is one that not only provides the meaning of a word, but also shows its acceptable pronunciation.

Trying to understand the text contents is termed as learning by contexts. It is called so since learning a real text will help learners experience the real use of language as a means of communication. They will learn to use words, phrases, and sentences

based on the context and know how to determine the meaning of a word according to its context. This activity gives them the opportunity to learn that an English word may have several possible senses, whose meaning depends on the context in which it is used.

English a stress language (Fromkin, 1984). It means that stress plays so important a role in determining the sense of a word. A large class of English words, mostly of two syllables, will differ in meanings only as a result of the different placement of stress. If the stress falls on the first syllable, for example, the two-syllable word is a noun or an adjective, whereas if it falls on the second syllable, the word is a verb. The following words, to mention but a few, belong to this category: conflict, contract, transport, export, import, transfer, increase, present, conduct, record, produce, suspect, perfect, convict, envelop, object, rebel, frequent, permit, abstract, addict.

Cultural Aspects

Culture should be an integral part of foreign language learning. One who masters a foreign language will not be able to communicate it properly if s/he does not possess a good knowledge of the culture in which the language is originated. Such knowledge will help avoid culturally based misunderstanding and intercultural communication activities will run smoothly and properly without cultural hindrances and gaps. The following are examples of some cultural aspects adapted from Levine & McNulty (1987).

Introduction in English

Introduction ranges from formal to informal styles. In formal introductions speakers use longer sentences, titles (e.g., Dr., Mr.) and formal words and phrases (e.g., "I would like to introduce you to" ..., "how do

you do?", "it's a pleasure to meet you"). On the contrary, in informal introductions speakers use reduced words and sentences and simpler language (e.g., "nice to meet you," "how you doing"). A very informal introduction does not include titles or last names.

When status or age is different between two individuals, formal titles and last names are used unless the person of lower status is told to use the first name. Direct eye contact and firm handshakes are customary during introduction. Immediately after introduction, there is usually a period of time when impersonal or trivial subjects are discussed. "Small talk" is an important type of conversation that can help lead into interesting discussions. Small talk is usually initiated with such questions as "Do you live in this area?" "How do you like living here?" or "What are you studying?". Such questions as "Are you married?" or "How old are you" (to an adult) are generally considered too personal for initial meetings.

Expression of Thank You

The expression "thank you" is used as a polite response to different kinds of favors and compliments, and it is often automatic (e.g., "Thanks for calling", to someone on the phone or "Thank you" to a teller in a bank).

Directness in Verbal Interaction

English strongly emphasizes directness in verbal interaction. This is exemplified by such expression as "Don't beat around the bush," "Let's get down to business," and "Get to the point." For example, when passing a professor's office a student may say "Excuse me, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions". Her professor may respond, "Sure, go right ahead, what's the problem?" In this interaction the student

stated her purpose and the professor responded immediately.

Offers and responses to offers provide another example of directness. In verbal interaction, for example, if you come to a dinner party and the host offers you and you say, "No, thank you," the host will not repeat the offer more than twice because s/he assumes that your refusal is honest and direct.

However, there are limits to degree of directness a person is allowed to express, especially with people of higher status such as teacher and employers. A male student was surprised at the reaction of his female teacher when he said, "What happened to you? You look like gaining a lot of weight!" when the teacher replied, "That's none of your business," he answered in an embarrassed tone, "I was just being honest. In this case, his honesty and directness were inappropriate and unappreciated because the teacher-student relationship. In addition, people do not like being told that they are fat.

Most English and American people interpret silence in a conversation to mean disapproval, disagreement, or unsuccessful communication. They often try to fill silence by saying something even if they have nothing to say. They do not appreciate a person who dominates a conversation. Interrupting someone's speaking is considered rude as well.

Punctuality

Punctuality means being on time. The expression "time is money" indicates that English and American people value time greatly. If you promise someone to come for an appointment, you have to be punctual. If you are not able to come on time, you have to call him or her on the phone. Being late without prior notice is considered rude and irresponsible because

punctuality is one of the important cultural elements in England and American as well as other countries that regard time as a valuable thing in life.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The paper has discussed linguistic and cultural aspects to notice in learning English as a foreign language. Linguistic aspects are elements within a language which are very important to learn when learners want to master a foreign language well. However, mastering a language is not identical to mastering linguistic aspects. To be able to communicate properly, learners also need to know the culture from which the language originally comes. Whereas maste-

ring linguistic aspects will help learners to speak the language fluently and proficiently, cultural aspects will aid them in avoiding culturally based misunderstandings during communication activities.

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