Grammatical Competence within L2 Communication: Language Production, Monitor Hypothesis, and Focus on Forms Instruction

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ABSTRACT

Bearing in mind that the learners’ speaking skill had become the main goal in learning language, grammatical competence is believed to have a big role within foreign language learners’ language production, especially in spoken form. Moreover, the learners’ grammatical competence is also closely related to the Monitor Hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1982) in which it says that the acquired system will function as monitor or editor to the language production. The students’ monitor performance will vary based on how they make use of their acquired system. They may use it optimally (monitor optimal user), overly (monitor over-user), or they may not use it at all (monitor under-user). Therefore, learners’ grammatical competence has its own role, which is very crucial, within learners’ language production, which is not only to produce the language, but also to monitor the language production itself. Because of this reason, focus on form instruction will give a great impact for students’ grammatical competence within their communicative competence. This paper aims to present ideas about the how crucial the role grammatical competence within learners’ L2 communication.

Key Words: Grammatical competence, Monitor hypothesis, Focus on form instruction

INTRODUCTION

The main objective to master the language, English in particular, has become to be able to communicate using the language. Richards (2008:19) says that the learners’ mastery of speaking skill has become the main goal in learning English as a second language or foreign language. Moreover, he states that the learners will assess their success in language learning, especially how effective they use the language, by looking at how they have improved their speaking skill.
However, in foreign language classroom, the learners are not exposed to produce the language orally. In fact, most of the time, they are exposed to explicit learning focusing on the use of language rules. Due to this fact, there are some possible problems faced by the teacher. For instance, there might be a learner who is found having difficulty in saying something, but actually he knows exactly what he wants to say. In this particular case, he is aware of the use of grammar or language rules. However, this awareness leads him to feel reluctant whenever he is asked to say something in the target language. It seems that he is afraid of making mistakes related to the use of grammar itself. This particular condition leads to question whether it is still appropriate to teach grammar or not in the communicative language teaching.

Meanwhile, the existence of grammar within communicative language teaching is essential. Communicative teaching which only focuses on meaning and gives little attention to grammatical rules are not sufficient to prepare the learners to be fluent (Pica, 2000). As a result, the learners tend to commit grammatical errors in which at the same time they are unable to spot them because they lack proper grammatical knowledge (Praise and Meenakshi, 2015). Ellis et al., (2002) suggest that the teaching of linguistic form, grammatical rules in particular, continue to take major part in language pedagogy. Thus, it can be said that grammar has its own role within the L2 communication or communicative competence. Canale and Swain (1980:27) propose that communicative competence will be at least consisting of three components such as grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (communication strategies). Thus, to be able to communicate using the target language, the learners need to be able to use their grammatical competence. In other words, grammar has its own role to deliver meaning or messages within the communication. When someone is not accurate in saying something, there is possibility that people whom he/she talks to will misunderstand about what he/she actually wants to say.

The way of the learners making use of their grammatical competence will determine how effective they communicate with other people. In this particular case, it has specific role to the learners’ language production. In relation to this matter, Krashen (1982:15) states that there is a mental device inside human beings which is gained from learning process that has function as an editor to what he/she says. This mental device is called monitor. This monitor is formed through such a process called learning. The process of learning itself will be closely related to the conscious process, in which in this matter, it is related to the process of explicit learning of grammatical rules. Therefore, learning process involving learning the grammatical rules will enable the learners to have such a device to correct their mistakes. However, it should be noted that this particular monitor will be operated according to the learners’ ability in making use of it. Once the teacher notices the students’ monitor performance, it is very crucial for them to be able to make use of certain technique and approach in teaching grammar to the students.

Applying certain technique and approach in teaching grammar not only make the teaching and learning process become effective and meaningful but also improve the students’ competence in understanding the grammar rules. One of the approaches that can be used is focus on form instruction which focuses on students’ engagement within communicative activities while drawing their attention to the target forms (Brown, 2015). Ho and Binh (2014) used communicative approach to teach grammar by applying some dialogues and interactional activities. The result of their study showed
that the grammar mastery of the learners was improved and the learners could do well in the test. The mean score of the learners who were taught by using communicative approach (7,38) was higher than those who were not (5,64). Meanwhile, Nahid et al., (2015) used conscious-raising task technique to teach grammar. This technique required the learners to formulate grammar rules from the tasks and discuss the rules with their friends. The result of his study also showed that the learners’ score in grammar test was improved.

Hence, regarding the explanation above, it can be said that having appropriate grammatical competence will give such ability to the learners to produce the language correctly. Moreover, it can function as editor to their language production so that they will be able to correct their utterances whenever they make mistakes. Therefore, this paper provides the readers with such an explanation on how grammatical competence will help the learners to communicate well in the target language. For the English teachers in particular, this paper will give such perspective in which they need to be more aware to the use of grammatical competence, related to both language production and correction, in the teaching and learning process, especially in creating such communicative environment inside the classroom.

METHODS

This study aimed to give comprehensive insight related to the role of grammatical competence within students’ L2 communication. Therefore, it used qualitative research approach in the form of library research focusing on gathering the information related to the subject investigated. The data were collected by using documentation. Moreover, there are two kinds of data used; primary and secondary data. The primary data was taken from Brown’s book entitled “TEACHING by PRINCIPLES: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy”, Krashen’s book entitled “Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning”, and Radford’s book entitled “Transformational Grammar: A First Course.” Meanwhile, the secondary data was taken from others resources such as books, articles, journal articles, and so on which is relevant to the subject described as the supporting data as well as argument provided by the writer. Furthermore, the data was analyzed descriptively by using deductive and inductive approach. In addition, content analysis method was also used in analyzing the data as well as drawing conclusion based on the content of the data itself. Likewise, the triangulation process used to validate the data collected. In this particular case, the data was triangulated and compared each other within the authors’ perspective related to the importance of grammatical competence within students’ L2 communication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Communicative Competence and Krashen’s Monitor Model

   Communicative Competence

   The communicative aspect of the language use in social life will be related to the communicative competence. Communicative competence refers to the competence to communicate (Bagaric and Djigunovic, 2007:94). It will highlight the use of language for communication (Louma, 2004:97). Due to this reasons, it can be said that communicative competence plays such an important role in daily life interaction. The successfulness of reaching the goal of social interaction will depend on the large extent of ability within communicative competence (Rickheit and Strohner, 2008:15). Canale
and Swain (1980:27) propose that communicative competence will be at least consisting of three components such as grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (communication strategies).

The first component of communicative competence is the grammatical competence. Canale and Swain (1980:29) defines grammatical competence as the type of competence in which it focuses on the use of lexical items, morphology rules, syntax, semantics, and along with the aspect of phonology (pronunciation). Moreover, it includes the basic element of communication such as the sentence patterns and types, the constituent structure, the morphological inflections, as well as the lexical resources (Murcia et al., 1995:16-17). Meanwhile, sociolinguistic competence refers to the ability to use the language based on socio cultural context in relation to the contextual factors such as topics, role of participants, settings and norms of interaction (Canale and Swain, 1980:30). It involves social and cultural aspect that are essential in relation to the ability to understand and deliver linguistic forms (Troike, 2003:18). The last component of communicative competence is strategic competence. Strategic competence refers to the mastery of verbal and non-verbal strategies to overcome difficulties in communication breakdowns to enhance the effectiveness of communication by paraphrasing, gestures, and varying intonation, speed or rhythm (Canale and Swain, 1980:30).

Thus, from the discussion above, it can be said that each of competence within the communicative competence has its own role. Grammatical competence deals with the ability of the learners to form sentences or utterances based on appropriate rules. This particular competence is mostly related to the accuracy. On the other hand, sociolinguistic competence deals with how to initiate interaction in certain society. When someone does not have sufficient knowledge about this competence or he does not have enough skill in sociolinguistic competence, it will be very difficult to him to interact with other people. For the strategic competence, the main purpose of this competence is to overcome the communication problems and difficulties. It will be related to both grammatical competence (verbal communication) and sociolinguistic competence (non-verbal communication). In other words, to be able to overcome the gap occurred within the interaction, the learners need to make use of their grammatical and sociolinguistic competence.

*Krashen’s Monitor Model*

Meanwhile, in relation to the production of language and SLA, Krashen (1982:9), proposes five basic hypotheses namely: The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, The Natural Order Hypothesis, The Input Hypothesis, The Affective Filter Hypothesis, and The Monitor Hypothesis. (1) The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, according to Krashen (1982:10), deals with the way how adult learners develop their competence in a language, which are called as acquisition and learning. Acquisition is described as subconscious process which is much more identical to the process of first language acquisition. Meanwhile, learning is described as a conscious process that focuses the learners’ attention on the form of the language. (2) The Natural Order Hypothesis deals with a certain orders in relation to the learners’ language development. Krashen (1982:12) states that grammatical structures are acquired in predictable orders. This assumption is based on the phenomenon in which the learners tend to acquire certain grammatical structures early and some others later. (3) The Input Hypothesis, according to Krashen (1982:20), deals with the way how the learners will acquire (not learn) the language in which by understanding the message that is described as *comprehensible*
input. Comprehensible input here refers to input in which containing our current knowledge \((i)\) and higher knowledge \((i+1)\) that we have not known yet. (4) The Affective Filter Hypothesis deals with the affective variables that are believed to be able to give a certain effect to the second language acquisition process. According to Krashen (1982:31), these variables are: motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety (5) The Monitor Hypothesis, according to Krashen (1982:15), deals with a certain mental device in which has function as an editor to the learners’ language production, both in spoken and written forms. This monitor is formed through the learning process done by the learners. To be clearer, consider the following:

**Table 1. Krashen’s Monitor Model in SLA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>The Acquisition Order</td>
<td>There are two ways of developing a second language. Acquisition is a subconscious process and learning a conscious process that results in ‘knowing about’ the language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The Input Hypothesis</td>
<td>Humans acquire language by understanding messages, or by receiving comprehensible input.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>The Natural Order</td>
<td>The rules of the language are acquired in a predictable order, some rules tending to come early and others later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>The Affective Filter Hypothesis</td>
<td>It consists of the affective filter, a mental block that prevents the acquirer from fully utilizing the comprehensible input they receive for language acquisition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The Monitor Hypothesis</td>
<td>Acquisition and learning are used in producing language. Acquired competence (subconscious knowledge) allows the learner to produce utterances while learned language (conscious language) serves as a monitor. The monitor allows correction of the language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this paper, grammatical competence of communicative competence and monitor hypothesis within Krashen’s Monitor Model will be the main focus, especially its role within the context of communication. The following discussion will discuss how they taking a part in producing the language as well as in correcting the language production itself.

2. **Grammatical Competence in L2 Communication**

Grammar is considered to be one of the important elements within communication in relation to form a speech. According to Ur (1988:4), Grammar can be defined as the rule of how to combine and construct words into larger units in aspect of meaning. It is a study of forming possible structures used in a language (Thornbury, 1999). Furthermore, he states that grammar is not always about the syntax and morphology, but it is all about linguistic chains and slots. It means that grammar will give such ability to someone (the speaker) to be able to chain some words in particular order (based on the rule) and also to give variation or finding another words which can
slot into any link in the chain. So, in this particular case to be able to communicate with others, it is necessary to possess ability on how to use grammar correctly.

Likewise, learning grammar does not necessarily means to learn about the grammar itself, but also other aspects of language. Radford (1988:2) suggests that grammar refers to the set of rules or principles that contain how to construct, pronounce, and understand phrases and sentences in the language concerned. It means that in learning grammar, not only the aspect of syntax that is going to be learned, but also the aspect of phonology and morphology as well. So, by mastering grammar, it is possible to someone to speak about something in the language correctly and smoothly.

Moreover, within the context of communication, the role of grammar is not merely regarded as such a device in which it regulates the rules in producing the language, but something more than that (Praise and Meenakshi, 2015). Chomsky, in the discussion of generative grammar, proposes a term called Universal Grammar which is related to the highly abstract principle inside human’s mind. In this matter, grammar is considered to be an internal knowledge related to the process of how to produce the language. Hence, it can be said that language is the reflection of the grammar itself.

Thus, having appropriate grammatical competence will help the learners to possess such ability in producing the language. It is closely related to how to combine lexical resources as well as the rules correctly. Moreover, it also related to the ability in understanding the message or the idea delivered while having interaction with other people. Therefore, it has such significant role to make such communication takes place.

3. Monitor Hypothesis in L2 Communication

Every learner will have their own capability and competence in getting certain knowledge, especially in acquiring a language. Some of them might be high achievers and the others might be low achievers. This is the most fundamental thing in relation to the way they get proper knowledge about particular thing as well as acquiring the language. In relation to this matter, Krashen (1982) proposes that learners will acquire the second language through the process of language learning and language acquisition. He states that acquisition initiates learner’s utterances in a second language and responsible for their fluency, meanwhile learning has only one function, and that is as a Monitor, or editor. Learning has the role to make changes in the form of utterance, after is has been "produced" by the learned system. This process is called as Monitor Hypothesis. In other words, the second language learner can use the learned rules to “monitor” or correct his language either before or a moment after language production.

According to Krashen, learned system and acquired system develop in very different ways. In his view, language acquisition develops exclusively from "comprehensible input." That is, second-language learners acquire language competence by exposure to language that is both understandable and meaningful to them. By concentrating on meaning, they subconsciously acquire form. No matter how appropriate the input, however, acquisition will not occur if a student's "affective filter," or collection of emotional responses that impede comprehension of meaning, is raised. Language learning, however, occurs quite differently. Language learning take places through the formal study of rules, patterns, and conventions (explicit learning). Because of this reason, language learning is closely related to the learners’ grammatical competence. Moreover, Krashen insists that learning does not turn into acquisition except in a certain convoluted way. This can occur only if second-language learners
successfully monitor their language production so that they provide their own grammatically correct comprehensible input. This self-produced input then becomes part of the total necessary for learned system to take place (Krashen, 1982). Hence, both acquired system and learned system have their own role within language production. The acquired system will be responsible to initiate the language production; meanwhile the learned system will act as monitor. To make it clear, consider this figure:

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 1**: Acquisition and learning in second language acquisition. (Adapted from Krashen 1982:16)

The figure above reveals how monitor will edit the output of the production of the acquired system. The monitor will edit or correct the output before or after the utterance is actually spoken or written. So, the monitor will not only edit the learners’ speech production, but the written production as well.

However, not all of the learners are having chance to acquire the language. In foreign language teaching and learning process, the learners are much more exposed to the explicit learning which focuses on language rules. As a result they will mostly depend on their learned system, which is in this case related to their grammatical competence, to produce the language. Because of this reason, foreign language learner will use their monitor based on how they make use of their learned system. Krashen (1981) states that there are three variation of monitor use which can be identified; monitor over-users, under-user, and over-user.

**Monitor Over-users**

The first variation is monitor over-users. Krashen (1982:19) suggests that monitor over-users refer to people who attempt to monitor all the time, performers who are constantly checking their output with their conscious knowledge of the language production. Furthermore he says that this kind of performers tends to speak hesitantly, often self-correct in the middle of utterances, and are so concerned with correctness so that they cannot speak fluently.

There may be two possible different causes for over-user of the monitor, for instance the use of grammar. Over-user may first does not have sufficient experience in the language production, especially in oral production. They might have been be a victims of the learning process which only focus on the aspect of grammar, so they do not acquire much proper experience in language and do not have any choice except to be dependent on the learning process itself. Another possibility may be related to personality. These over-users have had a chance to acquire, and may actually have acquired a great deal of the second language. They simply do not trust this acquired system and only feel secure when they refer to their Monitor.

**Monitor Under-user**

The second variation in relation to the variation of the use of monitor is monitor under-user. According to Krashen (1982:19), monitor under-users refer to performers who have not learned, or if they have learned system, they prefer not to use their conscious knowledge, even when conditions allow it. These performers are typically
uninfluenced by error correction, self-correct only by using their feeling for correctness (e.g. "it sounds right"), and rely completely on the acquired system.

Stafford and Covitt (1978) in Krashen (1981:17) note that some under-users pay "lip service" to the value of conscious grammar. Their subject felt that people need conscious rules to speak "correctly", and that "grammar is the key to every language". The subject, however, hardly used conscious rules at all, in speech or writing. Furthermore, Krashen (1981:16-17) says, “The under-user may be living in the country where the target language is spoken or may be exposed to frequent use of the second language in his own country.”

Optimal Monitor Users

The last variation of the use of monitor is optimal monitor users. According to Krashen (1982:20), optimal monitor users refer to performers who use the Monitor when it is appropriate and when it does not interfere with communication. Many optimal users do not use grammar in ordinary conversation, where it might interfere. In writing, and in planned speech, however, when there is time, optimal users are typically able to make whatever corrections they can to raise the accuracy of their output.

Optimal Monitor users can therefore use their learned system, as a supplement to their acquired system. Krashen (1982:20) says, “Some optimal users who have not completely acquired their second language, who make small and occasional errors in speech, can use their conscious grammar so successfully that they can often produce the illusion of being native in their writing”. This does not imply that conscious learning can entirely make up for incomplete acquisition. Some un-acquired rules will be learnable and others not. The optimal user is able to complete the gap in conscious learning, but not all of it.

Krashen (1982:16) states that there are three conditions that need to be achieved in order to make conscious grammar fully operated. However, it does not necessarily mean that the users can fully operate their monitor even if these conditions are met. Those conditions are, (1) time. He says that there must be sufficient time in order to use the grammar properly. In conversational activities, sometimes there is no sufficient time to think or even to use the grammar properly; (2) focus on form. Having sufficient amount of time will be not enough in operating the monitor. The speaker or the performer needs to consider the form also. This process may lead to the process of thinking about correctness; and (3) know the rule. This is the most difficult requirement due to the fact that the structures of language are complex. There are so many aspects which need to consider. He stresses that this is become the problem because even the best learners do not learn every rule they are supposed to.

4. Focus on Forms Instruction

Teaching grammar can be a very complex task to do since the teacher will not only teach the rules but also teach other aspects of language. In relation to this problem, the teachers may apply some approaches, principles, and techniques in teaching grammar, so that the teaching and learning process can be effective and meaningful.

In the teaching of grammar itself, there are four approaches that can be applied. The first is inductive approach which emphasizes on a process of discovering the grammar rules by examining examples. When they discover the rules, they will practice by creating their own examples (Thombury, 1999). The second is deductive approach. Deductive approach emphasizes on a process in which the teachers presents the
grammar rules and gives examples by highlighting the rules. The third is implicit presentation of forms approach which emphasizes on a process in using the target form in certain communication (Savage, 2010 as cited in Brown, 2015). The fourth is focus on form approach which emphasizes on a process of trying to draw the learners’ attention to the target grammatical rules while they are engaged in communicative activities.

Meanwhile, the principles that underline grammar teaching are focusing on all three dimensions of grammar, namely form, meaning, and use, letting the learners to have the opportunity in practicing and using forms in communicative tasks, emphasizing on both input-based (comprehension) and output-based (production) grammar and vocabulary, and using inductive, deductive, implicit presentation of forms or focus on forms approach based on the learning objective and the learners’ need (Loewen, 2011 as cited in Brown, 2015).

One of the approaches that focuses on grammar, meaning, and use is focus on form approach. This particular approach tries to draw the students’ attention to the grammar rules as they are engaged in communicative activities (Brown, 2015). The main focus itself is also within students’ capability in noticing grammatical features which is crucial for successful target language use. Some of the characteristics, according to Brown (2015); keeping the natural language acquisition, conforming more easily to the concept of interlanguage development, allocating the students to get communicative feel, and developing intrinsic motivation by allowing the students to discover the rules rather than being told to them.

To maximize the effectiveness of the approach, in helping the student to notice the grammatical rules explained, the teacher may apply some techniques. There are some techniques that can be used, according to Brown, (2015), to teach grammar; (1) the first technique is using charts, objects, maps, and drawings; (2) the second technique is using dialogues and conversations. Dialogues and conversations have been successfully used to introduce and practice grammar rules; (3) the third technique is input enhancement which involves highlighting certain target of grammatical forms in a reading text or stressing certain forms when speaking; (4) the fourth technique is input flood. It contains a target structure that appears frequently; (5) the fifth technique is input processing. It refers to the process of using text for input. Thus, the learners can make the necessary connections in authentic contexts of L2 use; (6) the sixth technique is dictogloss. Dictogloss means a task-based procedure designed to help L2 learners internalize certain grammatical elements that are built into a text. Through the reconstruction of a text, the learners come to notice certain grammar rules.

Therefore, as it is mentioned above, focus on form approach is one of the approaches in teaching grammar which focuses on students’ ability recognizing the grammatical features while engaging in communicative activities. Applying this approach will give opportunity to the student to develop their communicative skill without ignoring the use of grammar. Moreover, to maximize the effectiveness of this approach, the teacher should combine the teaching activities with some appropriate techniques.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be concluded that grammatical competence has its own role in L2 communication. It responsible for both language production and the correcting process of the language production itself. Grammatical competence will give such
ability to the learners to not only use the language properly and deliver the idea or the message accurately, but also to understand the message itself. Moreover, it can also function as an editor to the language production, which is related to the monitor hypothesis proposed by Krashen. He states that the process of explicit learning on grammatical rules will enable such a device called monitor that has function to monitor the language production, both in spoken and written forms. However, the way of the learners make use of their monitor will be varied based on their grammatical competence. They may use it optimally, overly, or even do not use it at all. Regarding this issue, focus on forms as the approach in teaching grammar is considered to be the appropriate approach to be used because it is not only will improve students’ communicative aspect, but also to be much more aware to the grammatical features within the context used.

REFERENCES


