

Analytical Review of Universal Grammar (UG) Approach on Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

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Doi:10.7575/aiac.all.v.6n.2p.1

Received: 20/10/2014

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.6n.2p.1>

Accepted: 05/01/2015

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the analysis of Universal Grammar (UG) approach on Second Language Acquisition (SLA). This paper is significant as the sources for teacher or researcher of the second language since this elaboration is deeply focusing on the use of UG on SLA. The method used in this academic writing is inductive method of writing. Three main analyses namely Construct Knowledge of Language, Acquiring Language and Language Use are elaborated strongly in this paper. Furthermore, this paper concludes that UG is very important on teaching and learning of the second language in Indonesia.

Keywords: Universal Grammar (UG), Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

1. Introduction

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a study that focuses on how the learners acquire the language. On the other words, SLA is research field that concerns on learners and learning rather than teacher and teaching. Other definition, Selinker (2008) in Vanpatten and Benati (2010:1) stated that SLA is the study how the learners create a new language system. In so doing, from the part of the SLA study, it is known what is learned and what is not learned.

To acquire the language particularly in second language acquisition there are many approaches that are appeared from the researchers and linguists. In 1990s, language is encapsulated in its own module in the mind/brain, and comes equipped from birth with a set of language-specific constraints called **Universal Grammar (UG)** (Vanpatten and Benati, 2010:4). Furthermore, UG is one of the famous approach that is applied to the learners and learning. In this approach, the scholars believe that language is acquired by the learners through the interaction Universal Grammar with data from outside world.

To know more about the UG and the Analysis of UG on SLA, this paper is prepared to explore it. This paper is very crucial to be known by the teacher and learners since it is very helpful to identify whether UG is relevant for Second Language (L₂) learners or not. Furthermore, in this Analysis, the evidence from other researcher is prepared about UG beside the writers' experience is also provided for additional supporting elaboration about UG.

2. Universal Grammar Approach

Chomsky (2000:4) stated that each language is the result of the interplay of two factors: 1) the initial states, and 2) the course of experience. It can be thought of the initial state as Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that takes experience as "input" and the language as "output" that is internal represented in the mind/brain. Additionally, Vanpatten and Benati (2010:11) elaborated that initial state refers to the starting point for L₂ learners; namely, they bring to the task of acquiring another language. Interestingly, in UG approach knowledge on native language (L₁) is initial state. All in, UG approach is basically interaction between innate knowledge and the knowledge from the mind and brain or outside data.

Universal grammar is defined by Chomsky as "the system of principles, conditions, and rules that are elements or properties of all human languages the essence of human language" (Chomsky, 1978 in Johansson, 1991: 2).

Cook gives rules that supposedly belong to this universal grammar:

1) Structure dependency. All operations on sentences are defined in terms of phrase structure, rather than e.g. linear sequence. This is probably the least controversial of all the proposed rules of universal grammar, being strongly supported both by all available data, and by most people's linguistic intuition.

2) The Head parameter. Each phrase contains a "head" (main word), and all phrases in a given language have the head in the same position. The head position is, however, different from language to language, which introduces the important concept of a parameter-governed rule. Unfortunately it is not too difficult to find exceptions to this rule — for example, the two English noun phrases "high court" and "court martial" have the heads at opposite ends — weakening the case for including it in a universal grammar, and

3) The Projection principle. Properties of lexical entries project onto the structure of the phrases of which they are the head. This rule ensures e.g. that a verb gets the appropriate number and type of objects. The universality of this rule is far from self-evident — it is strongly dependent upon a particular grammatical theory (Government & Binding), in which the lexicon carries much of the linguistic information that could otherwise be expressed as phrase structure rules. Some equivalent of the projection principle may be needed, but it might look completely different if another theory of grammar were used.

From the definition and principle of the UG, it can be formulated the 3 important things in Language Acquisition as on table below:

No	Elements	Universal Grammar
1	Construct Knowledge of Language	Lexicon is the core of human language.
2	Acquiring Language	Innate languages faculty to guide the learners.
3	Language Use	Concern with knowledge of language and Competence, not Performance.

3. Analysis

From the previous explanation, there are 3 kinds of elements that need to be analyzed. They are:

3.1 Construct knowledge of Language

Chomsky argues that Lexicon is the core of human language as the lexicon is divided in to lexical categories or content of words such as verbs and nouns, and functional categories or grammatical words such as determiners and auxiliaries. On the other word the Universal Grammar focus on the Vocabulary and Grammar. The element of language in SLA is not only focus on lexicon but also focus on phonology, pronunciation, semantic, pragmatic and so on. On the other words, there are four skills that have to be mastered by the learners in language. They are listening, reading, speaking and writing. As information, listening and reading are receptive skills. Then, speaking and writing are productive skills (Harmer, 2007: 270 and 275).

In so doing, if the learners merely learn about grammar and vocabulary, they are getting to analyze the language not to use the language (Celce-Murcia, 2001:3). So, the language acquisition is not occurred perfectly since the learners should know how to analyze and to use the language.

Additionally, based on my experience on some teaching learning process in Indonesia on October 16-17 2013, when they are merely taught about grammar and vocabulary, the students are afraid to speak English in daily life because they are not often to use the language for communicating. They have a hesitation on their pronunciation and may be on the dialect that they have in the native language gives an influence on their target language.

All in all, Universal Grammar approach cannot provide all the elements, which are needed in SLA. Because of that, this is one of the lacks of UG approach that to be known by researchers, teachers and scholars even though many teachers still use the UG approach on daily teaching learning process of second language or foreign language.

3.2 Acquiring Language

In UG Approach, the learners acquire the language with innate language faculty. It means the learners acquire the target language with referring to the initial state or L_1 of learners. On the other word, the mother tongue is very helpful to get the target language. Vanpatten and Benati (2010:11) stated that a number of scholars believe that from the very beginning, all the properties of the L_1 are transferred into SLA (eg. Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996). In so doing, the learners try to get the L_2 by full transferring to the L_1 .

Nowadays, the use of L_1 is not a modern method in acquiring the target language. Especially in Direct Method, the L_1 is forbidden for teaching learning process (Celce-Murcia, 2001: 6). Additionally, based on my experience while getting the teaching practice in one of school on Senior High School level, L_1 is still commonly used in teaching learning process since the students do not understand if totally teaching by using target language. Even though that this is very old way to acquire the language, the students get the target language by using L_1 with looking at dictionary when they do not know the meaning.

All in, the L_1 actually influences the students' ability to get the target language, even though explicitly, there is not allowed for using L_1 in many approaches but implicitly the L_1 is used to get the target language. So, this is the one thing that influence teacher particularly teaching the second or foreign language.

3.3 Language Use

In UG approach the learners are emphasized to know the language knowledge and competence rather than performance. When the students are focus on the language knowledge and competence, they are getting to study about grammar and vocabulary and the emphasized skills that are reading and writing. In so doing they do not have an ability to communicate meaningfully with the target language. Hymes (1972) Arguing against Chomsky (1975), Hymes proposed that knowing a language involves more than knowing a set of grammatical, lexical, and phonological rules. In order to use the language effectively, learners need to develop communicative competence or the ability to use or perform the

language. Hymes' notion of language performance was examined by a number of practice-oriented educators in 1980 (Hiep, 2005:3).

According to my experience while teaching English as Foreign Language in Indonesia, I applied UG approach to the learners. In so doing, they are very competent in grammar and memorizing the vocabulary given but they never use the language in daily communication since they are not asked to use it in daily life. And based on my reflection it is because they do not have an opportunity to use it in class. They always study about grammar and vocabulary so they lost of performance of the language it self. In contrast, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011:125) said that target language is vehicle for communication, not just an object to be studied.

To sum up, in UG approach students/learners are getting to analyze and competence on the target language rather than to use or perform the target language. Because of that the scholars, teachers and researcher are expected to know this principle in UG approach so they can look to other approach that can improve the learners' ability in communicative performance.

4. Conclusion

All in all, the UG approach is very commonly used in teaching learning process based on my experience in Indonesia even though many of the approach nowadays do not allow students to apply it in acquiring the target language. In terms of the three main elements for second language acquisition namely construct knowledge of target language, acquiring language and language use, UG approach is not appropriate for now days since learners are getting to use the language rather than to analyze the language. On the other word, we have the students be able to communicate in target language with real world context and using the target language in processing of learning and acquiring the target language itself.

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