

LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON ELT

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Abstract: There are at least two reasons why linguistic creativity is appealing and hence worth discussing in this paper: Firstly, linguistic creativity serves profound explanation to individual differences in the sense that people have unique ways to express themselves in a language. In the perspective of a stilistic approach we can sense how literary authors are obviously unique to one another in terms of their writing styles even when they have to depict the same theme. Secondly, linguistic creativity also serves profound explanation to the fact that a human's language is basically a product of his mental ability that operates according to the rules of grammar. In this sense, human's linguistic creativity is viewed as rule-governed creativity.

Keywords: Linguistic Creativity, ELT

According to Chomsky (1966), linguistic creativity is understood as a humans' mental ability to comprehend and produce novel utterances which they have never encountered before: human beings are able to combine a finite known stock of elements on the basis of a finite known stock in a language (e.g., words, structure) to produce infinite sentences. In behaviorism's point of view there is no room for people to be creative since learning a language is seen as a process of habit formation resulting from input and positive reinforcement of correct habits, negative reinforcement of mistakes. For Chomsky, this habit based communication is unsensible. Human beings are by no means passive entities who take for granted whatever inputs come from the external surroundings. People are active subjects who organize linguistic data inputs in such a way that they are able to attain hypothesis formation of L2 rules and then put them into test in a real communication.

In any case, there are at least two reasons why linguistic creativity is appealing and hence worth discussing in this paper: Firstly, linguistic creativity serves profound explanation to individual differences in the sense that people have unique ways to express themselves in a language. In the perspective of a stilistic approach we can sense how literary authors are obviously unique to one another in terms of their writing styles even when they have to depict the same theme. In love poems, for example, Shakespeare in his Sonnets is likely to appear like a romantic poet as compared to Chairil Anwar whose gloomy style is likely to depict him as a desperate lover. In L2 language teaching, the phenomenon of this distinctive writing style is very transparent. In the writing class, for example, there is none of our students making the same compositions, despite the fact that both the arguments and the theme they refer to are similiar. Secondly, linguistic creativity also serves profound explanation to the fact that a human's language is basically a product of his mental ability that operates according to the rules of grammar. In this sense, human's linguistic creativity is viewed as rule-governed creativity. According to Chomsky, all

human's utterances in all languages are structured based forms generated by their mental ability. He labels it as universal grammar (UG) which is defined as a set of special cognition that consists of principles and parameters which serve as the basis or reference for understanding and producing grammatical sentences and which develop to become language competence (Kadarisman, 2011). It is LAD or Universal Grammar that makes people creative. With the constraints of grammar rules in LAD, people can make use of these limitation (finite means of language) both to comprehend as well as to generate infinite novel sentences.

THE FUNDAMENTAL ASPECTS OF LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY

In Chomskian tradition, linguistic creativity is one of his fundamental aspects of a language. With this concept, Chomsky intends to convey three important issues. Firstly, human beings have an ability to comprehend and produce infinite novel utterances. Secondly, the utterances that people produce are by no means conditioned by external stimulus, and thirdly all people's utterances resulted from their creativity operate according to the rule governed principle. Below is the explanation of these three issues.

Firstly, in Chomskian tradition, linguistic creativity is understood as a human' ability to comprehend and produce novel utterances which they have never heard and produced before. Moreover, this ability enables them to generate weird sentences which they have never heard or made before as seen in sentence 3 and 4 (Harras and Bachari, 2009).

- (1) *Gajah itu minum bir tiga drum hingga mabuk dan kemudian mendengkur di sudut kandangnya**.
- (2) *Harimau itu menyikat giginya dengan sikat gigi emas dan pasta gigi pepsodent biru**.

Secondly, humans' linguistic creativity to produce utterances or speeches is never conditioned by external stimulus. Instead, humans are free to produce a number of expressions no matter how appealing or unappealing the outsiders might affect the speakers. Linguistic creativity is concerned with what is going on in the human's mind. Whatever happens outside human beings their mental ability is still free to operate with or without this externality context. When faced with external stimulus, people might have a number of ways to express their ideas. For example, when being exposed with a bunch of roses, speakers would not constantly say 'rose' as frequently dictated in response to that sort of objects. Instead, they might produce a number of expressions such as '*what a flower*', or '*what a boring stuff*' (*Bunga lagi, bunga lagi. Bosan, ah*).

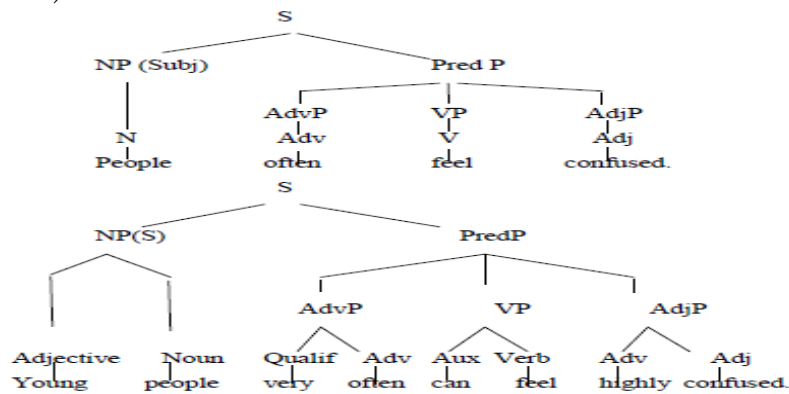
Thirdly, humans' linguistic creativity to generate new utterances is basically based on the rules they refer to from their mental grammar (UG). For that reason, Chomsky labels this type of linguistic creativity as 'the rule governed creativity which constitutes the normal use of language' (Chomsky 1966). According to this concept, sentences consist of a hierarchy of the constituents such noun phrases (NPs), verb phrases (VPs), etc., each of which can be broken down into parts. Grammatical rules do not refer to the linear position of individual words in a sequence, but rather to the manipulation of sentence constituents. For example, a rule in English, like $N \rightarrow N N$ together

with lexical insertion rules, can produce an infinite number instantiations like: a table → a table cloth → a restaurant table cloth → an Italian restaurant table cloth, etc. (Zawada: 2006). Also, a recursive rule like $S \rightarrow NP V S$ can account for a limitless recursion of embedded sentences. the modification of the phrase as the representation of creativity is possible as seen in sentence 3 and sentence 4. In these examples, we can see that the NP *people* (in sentence 3) is expanded in young people (in sentence 4); VP *often feel* (in sentence 3) becomes *very often can feel* (in sentence 4); the adjective *confused* (in sentence 3) becomes *highly confused* (in sentence 4).

(3) *People often feel confused.*

(4) *Young people very often can feel highly confused.*

These examples can be visualized in the following tree diagram (Hancock, 2010):



THE WEAKNESSES OF CHOMSKY'S PARADIGM

Chomsky's linguistic creativity is appealing and hence worth discussing. However, there are some areas of the human's language that remains unique where his theory cannot fully cover in order to offer satisfactory explanation. The weaknesses of his theory become obvious, especially when confronted with the sociolinguistic and pragmatic data. The following is the explanation about the counter argument from socio-pragmatic paradigm to Chomsky's theory of linguistic creativity.

In the perspective of socio-pragmatic study, people often use a language for social purposes. It is a phatic function of a language where the objective of the communication is basically to establish and maintain social cohesion among the members of the society. This necessity is clearly seen from the way people behave and speak before others by means of a polite language. In South Sulawesi, for example, it is more common that local people there use the first plural pronoun '*kita*', instead of the second one (e.g., *kamu*, *anda*, etc), to address their interlocutors (5).

(5) A: *Kapan kita datang ke Makassar, Pak?*

As an exception, a Makassarese policeman would never use '*kita*' when interrogating a thief.

(6) A: *Kapan kita mencuri ayam, Pak*.*

For most people outside South Sulawesi this term of address (*kita*) sounds awkward. However, this word as contextualized in a particular communication setting is considered appropriate for Makassarrese since it brings about the sense of politeness. Chomsky's theory in this context cannot deeply penetrate into a satisfactory explanation of why people choose a particular utterance but not another; why people with higher status get angry when inappropriately addressed by their co-speakers who are inferior in their status.

THE IMPLICATION OF LINGUISTIC CREATIVITY IN TEFL

Despite its weaknesses, the theory of linguistic creativity is worth considering when contextualized in the TEFL settings. The following is the description of pedagogical implications of linguistic creativity on the practice of the teaching of English as a foreign language.

1. Chomsky sees language acquisition as the gradual, creative buildup of knowledge systems, resulting in improved general competence; not just performance of habits in isolated instances. Linguistic creativity implies that L2 students develop their language proficiency through stages. In their early language development, the students make their efforts to master the L2 by intralingual and interlanguage approaches in forming and testing their hypothesis about L2 rules. Errors are a result of the evolving rule system. In the TEFL this implies that teachers should have different strategies to deal with students with different language proficiency levels. For the beginner students, teachers should keep enhancing their understanding on L2 grammar by giving clear explanation: L1 instruction is more preferable in this context to help students understand the teaching lessons. Overcorrection, however, should be avoided because it is likely to increase learners' affective filters and thus demotivate them to learn a language. For advance students, teachers should challenge them with higher teaching materials (N+1) as their L2 proficiency begins to grow.
2. At the early stage of language development drill exercises are quite helpful to make the students familiar with the foreign sounds. However, teachers should not do it excessively. As an alternative, teachers make use of other techniques that interest the students while continuously challenging their understanding. For example, teachers introduce a dialogue of grammatical sentences and then ask the students to put it into practice. The dialogue should be presented in simple ways (e.g., vocabulary, structure). Use of pair-work and group-work activities is common as well as individual and also teacher-led activities. Varied types of interaction are encouraged and nurtured.
3. Discussion on particular language rules is more relevant to the advanced students. This way can arise their metacognition on the complexity of L2 grammar rules and thus make them enriched with more complex structures. Whenever possible, ideally the materials for discussion should always be contextualized with the language use. Newspapers, magazine, journal are good examples of these contextualized materials.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Linguistic creativity is one of Chomsky's important concepts on the nature of a language. This concept helps us to comprehensively understand how human beings are always creative in creating the meanings, actualizing their ideas and thoughts by means of a language. In the L2 language teaching this concept is worth considering especially for L2 language instructors: they need to be aware that their learners are basically creative in learning L2 in the sense that they make their efforts to formulate the hypothesis of L2 rules, put them into test and later confirm them as a set of linguistic rules in their mind. Different language proficiency that students have implies that they are basically at the different stages of the language development. Hence, teachers should be patient and never give up for being creative to sustainably lead their students to the higher stage of their language development.

Linguistic creativity, however, is not the only concept. Socio-pragmatic studies has proven that this theory leaks. Correct forms alone cannot guarantee a successful communication. Hence, in the TEFL context, in addition to the teaching of grammar the L2 language teaching should be ideally enriched with the teaching of language functions. This objective should lead the students to interlanguage pragmatics which Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) defined as 'a non-native speaker's use and acquisition of linguistic action patterns in a second language'. With this competence they are able to comprehend and produce proper utterances according to the context where the communication occurs. It is a big challenge indeed.

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