STUDENTS’ PERCEPTION TOWARD ENGLISH GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

A THESIS
Submitted in Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Sarjana Pendidikan

Ranitia Apriliani Hartono
112011049

ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROGRAM
FACULTY OF LANGUAGE AND ARTS
UNIVERSITAS KRISTEN SATYA WACANA
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Thesis Examiner: Maria Christina Eko Setyarni, M.Hum
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Ranitia Apriliani Hartono:
STUDENTS’ PERCEPTION TOWARD ENGLISH GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION

RanitiaApriliani Hartono

ABSTRACT

In learning any languages, the center objective is to be able to communicate. In English language, we have what is so called grammar instruction. Grammar is the formula within, in which the language is produced. However, if ‘to be able to communicate only’ considered as a strict goal, grammar would be a minor part of mastering English. It would also ruin the ‘art’ of language construction after all. Grammar rules out the language usage for the sake of formality. Although the role of grammar has been widely approved as the very basic construction in learning English, the study of the practicality of grammar is still lacking, especially in Indonesia. The poor quality of English, both written and spoken of Indonesian students has become a concern in English educational field. Moreover, by understanding the perceptions in the first place, could lead to the possible prediction of students’ attitude and behavior toward grammar. Thus, to fill the gap, this current study attempts to investigate the students’ perceptions toward English grammar instruction in particular, to trigger further studies in figuring out the alternatives or solutions for better improvements in learning English.

Keywords: Grammar Instruction, Perception, Belief, Language Learners

INTRODUCTION

A grammar of a language describes the principles or rules governing the form of meaning of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences. “But if the rules of grammar are given no more justification than are the niceties of table manners, perhaps we should leave the teaching of them to finishing schools, especially since students know very well that imperfect grammar is not much of a stumbling block,” (Nunberg, 2005). According to this statement, (English) language teaching is not merely teaching how to express or communicate with the language, but it is also about the process of increasing language
learners’ awareness of the grammar instruction as the basic construction of English language. Thus, the main purpose of conducting this research is to analyze the perceptions and beliefs of students toward English grammar instruction. Without good grammar, clear communication is very difficult. Proper grammar keeps language users from being misunderstood while expressing thoughts and ideas. Writing and speaking correctly would definitely give the appearance of credibility and would be helpful to build a reputation as an expert in all fields. However, it might be a reflection for further research about language learning achievement and/or students’ attitude/behavior in English class practices.

For some teachers, grammar is an unreliable tool, and for others it is a source of fear (Odlin, 1994). Of that, EFL students have generally considered grammar structure as a necessary evil at best, and an avoidable burden at worst. This statement can be summed up as I have similar experience in my first year of college. Only few students would be concerned about accuracy of their language in terms of grammar structure. Since I feel this issue matters in relation to learn another language, in this case English, I think it is important to figure out the solutions, right before entering college world. With this in mind, this research was conducted in SMA Kristen 1 Salatiga.

It is important that teachers explore their students' perceptions on factors believed to enhance the learning of a new language and make efforts to deal with potential conflicts between student beliefs and instructional practices. Grammar structure is essential foundation for EFL students to ensure that their productive skills are
comprehended. Since students are language learners, it is essential to identify the perceptions to anticipate the behavior to a large extent. It is important to identify their perceptions because in the end, it might produce a result of factors influenced by their own perception. The review includes a brief overview of issue of this study. This study attempts to identify the perception of the students toward grammar, and it might lead to a profound influence on learning behavior and learning outcomes (Weinert & Kluwe, 1987).

It is apparent that the objective of this research is to identify students’ perceptions toward English grammar instruction.

Since we as pre-teachers, are mostly aware of the importance of grammar construction, we should prevent students in early age of failing at the base of language learning by identifying the perception of students toward grammar. It is because when we are engaging in another language, we need to be aware that the structure (grammar) is always being the foundation that supports the whole elements of that particular language. The most important thing in conducting this research is that we have to go back to the main purpose of learning particular language, which is to be able to communicate appropriately using that language. Learning a language is influenced by a variety of factors (Hosseini & Pourmandnia, 2013). Therefore, the focus of this paper is to identify one of the concerning issues in language learning, which is students’/learners’ perceptions. The final products using language that we produced will be judged based on structural factor, not merely on the fluency. The writings and utterances (productive skills) will be appropriate when those are grammatically correct, although there is a huge possibility that some learners might focus on the context instead of the structure form. It
is supported by the perception that grammar can hinder communication because the main purpose is to be able to communicate only. Therefore, applying good grammar into productive skills might dignify someone’s intelligence for the sake of formality.

This research aims to find out the EFL students’ perceptions toward grammar in relation to the English grammar practices they learn in school. Thus providing insights into their own perceptions and further their behavior toward grammar will be shaped after the perceptions are analyzed. I used questionnaire to interpret the data. The data results were later used as an analysis and behavior prediction about this whole research. It is hoped that the findings will be helpful for teachers to adjust their teaching methods and approaches in teaching English and their students will be able to sustain their awareness of the importance of grammar structure rather than understanding the context within.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a review of literature related to the students’ perception toward English grammar instruction. The deeper understanding of the whole study will be enlightened by equalizing the conception of several issues concerned. Hence, the writer may share the entire ideas that matter in this study and leads to the agreement with the readers.

Defining Terms

Perception: Perception is a very complex cognitive process that yields a unique picture of the world (Dhingra&Dhingra, 2011). According to them, there always one or more factors which might influence the perception itself. The way a person look at the
object that being perceived along with a picture s/he has in his/her mind might be different from another person. Floyd (1955), in his study, under the headline ‘The Phenomena of Perception’, stated that the viewpoint of the perceiver leads to a method that is productive of interest and challenges our explanatory efforts from the start. According to Lindsay and Norman (1977), perception is the process by which organisms interpret and organize to produce a meaningful experience of the world. Thus, the perceptions can be identified and followed by investigating the further study such as behavior.

Grammar : Grammar is “the set of rules that explains how words are used in a language : speech or writing judged by how well it follows the rules of grammar : a book that explains the grammar rules of a language” (Merriam-Webster.com, 2015). To be defined in a simpler term, grammar is a rule which also is a base of language construction. To achieve a formal speech or a well-structured writing, the language users ought to obey the rule (grammar). The speech and the writing can barely meaningful without a precise grammar. Hence, to be able to master the language, grammar has the biggest role in it.

The Role of Grammar

Language users have to be aware of grammar role within the language itself. Grammar is a set of rules that permit the language users, English in this context, to both absorb and create a language. To be able to master the language, learners’ awareness of grammar role is a must. Considering the basic purpose of language, we might agree that
language is used to generate meaning. It can also be understood as to communicate. People think differently, therefore to connect the idea of one another they have to use the language precisely according to the standard of grammatical correct. In a learning process, they will possess both receptive and productive skills. Listening and reading skills (receptive) are the basic level of understanding how the grammar is formed correctly before they can reflect the knowledge into writing and speaking skills (productive). However, the role of grammar is still debatable among the experts whether it is an essential point to be taught in schools. Some says it is important and some says it is not. Therefore, I believe that grammar is necessary.

THE STUDY

This study will answer the following research question: What perceptions do the students of SMA Kristen 1 Salatiga have toward grammar? To address this question, I conducted a quantitative study. This study attempts to gain deeper insights into the students’ perception toward grammar by using questionnaire as the data instrument. Several aspects implicitly induced in the questionnaire items. In this study, a close-ended questionnaire design was used to interpret the perception in particular. Overall, results indicate that Indonesian students are aware of the importance of the grammar in English language. From the study, it is readily apparent that EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students believed that grammar is substantial in learning English.
Context and Participants

This study was conducted in a public senior high school in Salatiga. In this school, English is taught merely to equip students with basic knowledge of English and prepare them to face national examination. The students are in a basic level of English. The reasons of the selection of this school as the context of the study are I have an access in the school and the school allows me to include potential participants for this study.

The participants in this study are 9th grader students in SMA Kristen 1 Salatiga. These students, aged 16 to 18 years old; most of them speak Bahasa Indonesia as their first and preferred language, and can thus be characterized as EFL students. The participants were three science classes with the total of 68 students. The study took place in the regular English class in the school. In addition, the questionnaire is included in the appendix.

Data Collection Procedures

This study employed questionnaire as research instrument. To collect the data, piloting was conducted. The sample for the data piloting was different from the actual participants in this study because the data piloting was not adequate enough to be interpreted. As suggested by my supervisor, the research context was changed due to the lack of the data needed. I conducted the piloting in SMP Kristen SatyaWacana with 10 students of 8th grader chosen randomly. The answers were complicated as the students apparently did not know the definition of grammar itself. Therefore, I conducted the research in SMA Kristen 1 Salatiga considering the grade level compared to junior high school students. The initial question items were designed to measure the students’
perception based own their own personal opinion. The goal of this study is to use the data from questionnaires to identify the specific perceptions that students have toward grammar. The students of SMA Kristen 1 Salatiga will be asked to put a thick (√) in the particular column under the options given. Those options are Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (DA), and Disagree (D). The students need to read and understand each statement as they will be responding by choosing one of the options.

Data Analysis

To answer the research question, data from the questionnaire will lead to a clearer conclusion in the end of the research. Such data will help to interpret and to expand our understanding of the complexity of student perceptions of grammar. Percentage of the entire data would lead us to achieve a richer picture of the perception that the participants have toward grammar along with 4 aspects: Awareness of the importance of the grammar, Grammar comparisons, Problems in learning, and Motivation to learn grammar.
RESULT

The questionnaire as the research instrument contained 4 different aspects. Those aspects are (1) awareness of the importance of the grammar, (2) grammar comparisons, (3) problems in learning, and (4) motivation to learn grammar. Likert-type scale is used to investigate students’ perception: Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1.

As shown in Table 1, the responses were positive since the average are all above 3.5 from the total 4 points. Each item contains a leading statement to make it easier for the participants to relate their initial perception to it. Item number 1 states if they are aware of the importance of grammar regarding language learning in terms of language...
system. 66 students (40=SA & 26=A) of the total 68 students agreed on this statement. Only 2 students disagreed. The survey showed that major participants see grammar as an important part of language system. The positive response is also shown for item 7 (46=SA, 21=A & 1=SDA). This item states that the participants should have learned grammar from their early age. It is apparent that they are demanding grammar lesson should be taught for young learners. Based on the quick review of the response’s brief reason, most of them were to wish that they were taught grammar from the early age so that they can master grammar in the present. This gave us a picture of how we should adjust the curriculum of grammar lesson in schools. Item number 8 also shown a similar result as much as 97% either strongly agreed or agreed and 3% either disagreed or strongly disagreed to the underlying statement. They had the positive perception of how mastering grammar is as important as mastering vocabularies. It also gave a viewpoint for teachers about grammar lesson should be taught as much as vocabulary practices. A similar statistic in item number 8 is also shown for item number 9. Most of the students agreed on the statement that “Using grammar correctly is as important as fluency in speaking in English.” (40=SA, 25=A & 3=DA). The major reasoning is they believed that fluency in speaking English is nothing without good grammars. Thus, the overview of this aspect is that the participants do have positive responses of the Awareness of the importance of the grammar.
Table 2. Grammar comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Items</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Sub Total</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Sub Total</th>
<th>Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 2: English’s grammar is almost the same as Bahasa Indonesia’s grammar</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td><strong>51%</strong></td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td><strong>49%</strong></td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 4: Grammar is similar as recitation.</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td><strong>65%</strong></td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td><strong>35%</strong></td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 5: Grammar is similar as mathematic formulas.</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td><strong>55%</strong></td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td><strong>45%</strong></td>
<td>2.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 contains Grammar comparisons aspect to expose the students’ perception by comparing grammar to other structure-items. In item number 2, in which states that “English’s grammar is almost the same as Bahasa Indonesia’s grammar”, 4 students strongly agreed, 31 students agreed, 25 students disagreed, and 8 students strongly disagreed. It cannot be judged as it is because it was based on individual’s point of view. Some students believe that grammar in English and Bahasa Indonesia are similar, while some students could not see the similarities. It also happened to item number 4 where statement “Grammar is similar as recitation.” underlies (11=SA, 33=A, 16=D & 8=SDA). Some students can relate grammar to recitation, some cannot. In statement for item number 5, where grammar positioned as the same as mathematic formula, some students agreed while some did not. This aspect section showed that the students tended to be divided over the nature of grammar as an object of learning. Hence, they seemed cannot relate grammar to the other structure-items.
Table 3. Problems in learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Items</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Sub Total</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Sub Total</th>
<th>Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 3: Grammar is the most difficult part in mastering English.</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 6: I can easily understand English grammar.</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 10: I feel not fluent to speak in English because I pay too much attention in using the right grammar.</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 3, the responses were quite varying since questionnaire item 3 and 10 were designed in such a way where the statements are negative, while the questionnaire item number 6 is positive regarding to the main topic. Thus, the means for those items other than item number 6 are reversed coding. The aspect induced in the questionnaire aims to examine the problems they have in learning English, especially its grammar. As the statement for item number 3, “Grammar is the most difficult part in mastering English.”, the responses showed assertive attitude as strongly agree and agree options were frequently chosen. As many as 15 students strongly agreed, 30 students agreed, while far less than half either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This survey may help teachers to adjust their teaching methods or techniques to make grammar lesson less hard as the students felt it is.

Similar with item number 3, the responses of item 6 was also predictable. It states if they can easily understand English grammar, and the results showed they cannot as 31 students disagreed and 8 students strongly disagreed. The strongly disagree option is the
most frequently chosen in this item among all of the questionnaire items. Only 7 students strongly agreed and 22 students agreed to this statement. Teachers might refer to this result to make English grammar more understandable.

Still, the result in item number 10 was easy to predict. The statement in this item is “I feel not fluent to speak in English because I pay too much attention in using the right grammar.”. As much as 63.23% agreed to this statement while 36.77% disagreed. This might inspire other researchers to investigate students’ anxiety in speaking English over too much attention on grammatical structure. This aspect assists teacher to help their students to reduce conflict and to overcome learning problems.

Table 4. Motivation to learn grammar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questionnaire Items</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Sub Total</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Sub Total</th>
<th>Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 11: Grammar lesson is an interesting one.</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 12: I expect more of grammar lessons in class.</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 13: I want to be better in acquiring and using English grammar.</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The perception aspect in Table 4 is Motivation to learn grammar. It gives conception of students’ learning motivation in grammar. Item number 11 leads a statement whether or not students see grammar as an interesting lesson. The results were surprisingly positive with 9 students strongly agreed and 38 students agreed to this
statement. Only 16 students disagreed and 5 students strongly disagreed. This demonstrates that the grammar lesson in the school under study was successful in making the students interested in learning grammar. Further students’ responses to the statement “I expect more of grammar lesson in class” show that they demand more grammar lesson within the school context by choosing strongly agree option (21 students), agree option (38 students), while only 6 students disagreed and 3 students strongly disagreed. This can be considered as teachers hint about their students’ desire of more grammar lesson in English class. On this basis, the grammar lesson allocation can be added.

Last but not least, the result in item number 13 plays the most important part of the overall perception aspects. The students do want to be better in acquiring and using English grammar. It was shown that 48 students strongly agreed and 19 students agreed while only one student strongly disagreed to the underlying statement.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose in this study is to elucidate the students’ perception toward grammar. Based on the result of this study, there were 4 different aspects that investigated: (1) awareness of the importance of the English grammar instruction, (2) grammar comparisons, (3) problems in learning, and (4) motivation to learn grammar. In the first aspect which told about awareness of the importance of the grammar showed positive responses from students which agreed that grammar as an important part of language system. For that reason, they also agreed that grammar lesson should be taught for young learners so that they can master grammar in the present. Furthermore, they also
gave positive perception of how mastering grammar is as important as mastering vocabularies, so that they also agreed that fluency in speaking English is nothing without good grammars.

Subsequently, in the second aspect which told about grammar comparison we could conclude that the answers of those statements were based on individual’s point of views. Based on the result, some of students agreed that English’s grammar is almost the same as Bahasa Indonesia’s grammar, then grammar is similar as recitation, and grammar positioned as the same as mathematic formula, but some students did not.

Moreover, in the third aspect which told about problems in learning also showed the result, firstly most of students agreed that grammar is the most difficult part in mastering English. In other hand, most of students disagreed that they could easily understand English grammar. The last, most of students agreed that they feel not fluent to speak in English because they pay too much attention in using the right grammar which refers on students’ anxiety to speak problem.

The last aspect which was about students’ motivation in learning grammar showed the result, firstly students gave positive response that grammar is an interesting lesson. From that statement also influenced the result from the next statement where students also agreed that they expect more grammar lesson in class. Last to conclude, the last statement showed positive result that the students do want to be better in acquiring and using English grammar.
Hence, based on the result it showed the implementation from students’ perception toward grammar. Based on that, it would be helpful for English teachers to reduce conflict regarding language learning by understanding their students’ perception in the first place. It is important for teachers to be aware of their students’ beliefs regarding the role of grammar instruction. It would facilitate teachers to design the kinds of learning techniques that students are accustomed to and prefer, and how these ideas mesh with their own. The students as the participants in this study, all having learned English in a foreign language setting, seem to agree that grammar has an important role in learning English. From the research results, it can be summed up that students do have positive awareness of the importance of grammar.

Despite the findings, I have to confess that this study needs refinement. As this is smallcase study, it awaits more studies in more various school contexts i.e. remote areas in Indonesia. I also call into question whether grammar lesson should be specifically taught to young learners for better improvements of English language learning.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study becomes a reality with the kind support and help of many individuals. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all of them. First and foremost, I want to offer this endeavor to Jesus Christ for without His graces and blessings, this study would not have been possible. My deep gratitude also goes to my supervisor, Ibu Elisabet Titik Murtisari, Ph.D., whose expertise, understanding, generous guidance, unwavering support and mentorship made it possible for me to finish this study. Nevertheless, I dedicate this study to my parents for supporting me, both morally and financially. It is their unconditional love that motivates me to set higher targets. I also place my record my sincere gratitude Ibu Maria Christina Eko Setyarini, M.Hum., as my academic advisor as well as my second reader, for her encouragements for all these years, especially to the completion of this study. I place on record, my sense of gratitude to one and all who, directly or indirectly, have lent their helping hand in this venture.
REFERENCES


### APPENDIX A: Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Pernyataan</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>STS</th>
<th>TS</th>
<th>Alasan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Gramatika (grammar) adalah bagian penting dalam berbahasa.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Gramatika (grammar) Bahasa Inggris hampir sama dengan gramatika Bahasa Indonesia.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Gramatika (grammar) adalah bagian paling sulit dalam menguasai Bahasa Inggris.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Gramatika (grammar) mirip seperti hapalan.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Gramatika (grammar) mirip seperti rumus dalam Matematika.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Saya dapat memahami gramatika (grammar) Bahasa Inggris dengan mudah.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Saya seharusnya belajar gramatika (grammar) Bahasa Inggris sejak dini.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Penguasaan gramatika (grammar) sama pentingnya dengan penguasaan kosakata (vocabulary).</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Pemakaian gramatika (grammar) yang benar sama pentingnya dengan kelancaran saat berbicara Bahasa Inggris.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Saya merasa kurang lancar dalam berbicara Bahasa Inggris karena terlalu memperhatikan konstruksi</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Penggunaan gramatika (grammar) yang benar.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Pelajaran gramatika (grammar) adalah pelajaran yang menarik.</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Saya menginginkan lebih banyak pembahasan tentang gramatika (grammar) di sekolah.</td>
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<td>Saya ingin menguasai gramatika (grammar) Bahasa Inggris lebih baik.</td>
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