CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Of all the methods and approaches discussed and proposed in the field of second language teaching after many years, one seems to prevail and surpass all others. Since the 1980s, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), first developed as a syllabus in response to the emerging theory of communicative competence, has been developed, adopted and disseminated rapidly worldwide. In addition, not only that it has become the mainstream approach in language teaching today, it has also influenced many other language teaching approaches and methods that claim to subscribe to similar philosophy of language teaching (see Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Interestingly, one problematical aspect in CLT, though, is the position of grammar in teaching-learning process. The debate regarding the position of grammar teaching has drawn significant attention from numerous experts, even after decades past. Apparently, in the earlier times when CLT started developing, several theorists and teachers persisted that CLT did not need to involve teaching grammar at all. The idea that CLT should avoid the incorporation of (explicit) grammar instructions in teaching learning process was largely based on Krashen’s idea (in Thompson 1996: 10) that grammar is a kind of knowledge which cannot be passed on in the form of statable rules, but can only be acquired unconsciously through exposure to the language, however, it is now generally accepted that

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current researches clearly indicate that grammar feedback is necessary for students to attain higher proficiency in the target language, and that formal attention to grammar can have beneficial impact on learning (see Nassaji and Fotos, 2004; Borg and Burns, 2008).

Even though it seems that the debate of whether (or not) grammar needs to be incorporated/integrated/embedded in CLT has come to a conclusion, experts still have different opinions concerning how grammar should be positioned in the context of CLT. Nassaji and Fotos (2004: 131) state that the challenge is to identify the best ways of doing so (integrating grammar in CLT) in second language classrooms and to maximize the opportunity for a focus on grammar without sacrificing the focus on meaning and communication. Furthermore, Ellis (in Borg and Burns, 2008: 457) concludes that, while there is general agreement about the need for learners to make form–meaning connections, there is no consensus among Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theorists regarding the degree of integration between grammar and communicative work which promotes language learning most effectively.

One way to view how grammar should be taught is from the perspective of teachers’ beliefs and how they practice their beliefs. Beliefs are our personal knowledge based on our experience and formed in interaction with the context in which we live (Perclova, 2006: 12). Educational researchers, according to Borg (2009: 1), became more aware of the fact that teachers were not robots who simply implemented, in an unthinking manner, curricula designed by others; rather, teachers made decisions, both before and while teaching, and these decisions thus...
became a new focus for educational researchers. The questions being addressed now were not simply ‘what do teachers do?’ but also ‘what do they think?’ ‘what decisions do they make?’ and ‘why?’ The notion of universally applicable teaching behaviours was viewed increasingly and critically as the uniqueness of different educational contexts – and particularly the uniqueness of teachers and learners as human beings – was acknowledged.

In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesian senior high schools, the matters discussed above can be related to the fact that Indonesia’s Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan 2004 gives teachers a certain degree of freedom in choosing materials and methods to be applied in classroom practice. The Ministry of National Education (Kemendiknas), nevertheless, provides competence standards and basic competences (Standar Kompetensi/ SK and Kompetensi Dasar/KD), which students are expected to accomplish. Regarding the integration of grammar into the teaching of English, Depdiknas’ Standar Kompetensi Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris untuk Sekolah Menengah Atas dan Madrasah Aliyah states in the section of theoretical base for the curriculum:

“Di tingkat SMA, bahasa lisan dikembangkan dengan realisasi linguistik yang semakin formal dan rumit yang ditandai dengan variasi ungkapan interpersonal yang melibatkan gambits, modals dsb. Hasil tulisan siswa pada kelas tiga SMA diharapkan sudah menggunakan gaya bahasa tulis. Ragam bahasa melibatkan variasi struktur noun phrase (structure of modification), variasi parts of speech di awal kalimat (Theme), kalimat majemuk setara dan beringkat dsb.” (Depdiknas, 2003: 13)

In other words, The Ministry clearly expects that high school students having completed English lessons can attain a certain degree of grammatical competence.
Borg (in Canh and Barnard, 2009: 247-248) reviewed 64 studies of language teacher ‘cognition’ (a broader term used by Borg, concerned with what teachers think, know and believe), 38 of them focussing on grammar teaching in three distinctive sub-topics: (1) teachers’ knowledge of grammar; (2) surveys of teachers’ beliefs about grammar teaching; and (3) the relationships between teachers’ beliefs about grammar teaching and their classroom practices. The overwhelming majority of studies reviewed by Borg took place in Europe, Britain or North America, and were mostly conducted in second rather than foreign language contexts. Only nine studies involving Asian teachers were reported: four in Singapore and five in Hong Kong. Borg emphasized the need for research in a greater variety of contexts, but – apart from those reviewed by Borg - only a few studies have been published dealing with Asian teachers’ beliefs, let alone Indonesian.

In the writer’s opinion, therefore, it is necessary to conduct a research studying English teachers’ beliefs in teaching grammar in Indonesian context for several reasons: (1) theoretically, there is still an ongoing debate on the position of grammar in ELT; (2) one way of seeing how grammar should be taught is from the teachers’ beliefs; (3) there are only a few studies regarding teacher’s beliefs in Asian context, let alone Indonesian.

According to Borg (2001: 186), belief is a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual, and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further it serves as a guide to thought and behaviour. Presumably, researching teacher’s beliefs commit to user
requires data which cannot be collected (merely) quantitatively, it needs to be conducted through interviews and observations. Suddaby (2006: 636) also states that there must be some degree of congruence between the research question (i.e. a researcher’s assumptions about the nature of reality and how one might know reality) and the methods used to address the question. The main objective of this study will be to generate theory rather than to test certain hypotheses. It is for those reasons, then, that the qualitative approach and Grounded Theory method are chosen to conduct this research.

B. Problem Statement

This study will try to address three major questions:

1. What are English teachers’ beliefs in teaching grammar?
2. How are their beliefs in teaching grammar reflected in their classroom practices?
3. What are the factors influencing their beliefs and practices in teaching grammar?

C. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To find out English teachers’ beliefs in teaching grammar.
2. To find out how those beliefs are reflected in their classroom practices.
3. To find out the factors influencing those beliefs and practices.

D. Benefits of the Study

Teachers participating in the study will benefit from the experience of reflecting their teaching beliefs and practices, particularly in the area of grammar...
teaching. The findings of the study will hopefully contribute to them (and to other teachers) with useful insights for their future teaching practices. This study is also expected to provide additional information to the existing studies about teacher’s belief of grammar teaching, contribute to an understanding of how teachers’ beliefs influenced the interpretation of their teaching practice and how they use this interpretation to teach, especially in Indonesian context. Lastly, this study might raise questions for future inquiry.