

A CONTRASTIVE STUDY OF GRAMMAR TRANSLATION METHOD AND COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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INTRODUCTION

Curricula for English Majors require that grammar teaching should be arranged as part of the program. As one of the required courses, grammar has been taught to English majors in universities and colleges for years. It is known that “grammar is a set of rules that define how words (or parts of words) are combined or changed to form acceptable units of meaning within a language” (Penny, 2000). Guaranteeing the accuracy of the sentences mainly depends on the learner’s mastery of grammar. Grammar, which is an indispensable part of a language, is so important that the teachers and students have always attached great importance to grammar teaching and learning. For the above-mentioned reasons, how to make grammar teaching and learning effective and efficient is an important task for both English teachers and researchers. Although college English teaching and learning research in Taiwan has undergone great changes during the past decades. The current grammar teaching in colleges is still characterized by the adoption of the traditional teaching method, which is known as the Grammar Translation Method. With this model, language structures are presented by the teacher, then practiced in the form of spoken or written exercises, and then used by the learners in less controlled speaking or writing activities.

Although the traditional grammar teaching method helps improve the students’ mastery of the grammatical rules, the students cannot use these rules flexibly and appropriately in communication. That is to say, the traditional grammar teaching method has its disadvantages which prevent the students from developing their communicative competence. Firstly, the traditional grammar teaching method is teacher-centered. As a result, the majority of the classroom time is spent on the teachers’ elaborate explanation of English grammar rules, while

all the students are either listening or taking notes. Thus little attention is paid to the development of English communicative competence. The students accept the English knowledge passively in the procedures set ahead of time by English teachers step by step. There is little use of the English language. The typical exercise is to translate sentences from English into Taiwanese or vice versa, to fill in the blank with a proper word and to correct errors in a sentence. So the students lack English communicative opportunities. Secondly, memorization and rote learning are the basic learning techniques, which cannot help to arouse students' interest, build their self-confidence or improve their communicative strategies in English learning and even makes them fear English grammar learning. An alternative to the traditional grammar teaching method is the Communicative Approach. The Communicative Approach makes language teaching as in real-world situation. Grammar learning is emphasized by communication through the approaches of 'learning by doing', through students' participation or co-operative completion of teaching tasks between or among students and teachers, then grammar can be acquired naturally by learners.

REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS WORK

In the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English with Taiwanese Translation, grammar is referred to as "study or science of, rules for, the words into sentences (syntax), and the forms of words (morphology)". The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English defines grammar as "the study of use of the rules by which words change their forms and are combined into sentences." In fact, grammar is "multi-dimensional" (Batstone, 1994) and has multimeanings. It is generally thought to be a set of rules for choosing words and putting words together to make sense. Every language has grammar. It has been held that if a language is a building, the words are bricks and the grammar is the architect's plan. One may have a million bricks, but do not make a building without a plan. Similarly, if a person knows a million English words, but he doesn't know how to put them together, then he cannot speak English (Brumfit, 2000). In other words, grammar is a framework to describe languages.

Looking at what principles can guide us in the teaching of grammar. Both Hedge and Thornbury (2001) give us some worthy answers. Hedge (2000) considers that the presentation of grammar

to learners should facilitate learning in many ways: It can provide input for noticing output and accurate forms of English; it can present high-frequency grammatical items explicitly to speed up learning; it can provide information about the communicative use of language structures by contextualizing them in spoken and written form; it can give information implicitly through exposure to examples or explicitly through instruction on the stylistic variation of language form.

Thornbury (2001) summarizes some rules of thumb about the teaching of grammar: the Rule of Context—teaching grammar in context, i.e. teaching grammatical forms in association with meanings (The choice of one grammatical form over another is always determined by the meaning the speaker or writer wishes to convey); the Rule of Use—teaching grammar in order to facilitate the learners’ comprehension and production of real language, rather than as an end in itself; the Rule of Economy—to fulfill the rule of use, be economical (economizing on presentation time in order to provide maximum practice time); the Rule of Relevance-teach only the grammar that students have problems with (starting off by finding out what students already know, and don’t assume that the grammar of English is a wholly different system from the learners’ mother tongue); the Rule of Nurture—teaching doesn’t necessarily cause learning—not in any direction (rather than occurring as flashes of insight, language learning is more often than not a process of gradual approximation. Instead of teaching grammar, try to provide the right conditions for grammar learning); the Rule of Appropriacy—interpret all the above rules according to the levels, needs, interests, expectations and learning styles of the students (Giving a lot of prominence to grammar, or it may mean actually teaching grammar at all—in any upfront way). Ellis defines the definition of grammar teaching from a broad sense: Grammar teaching involves any instructional technique that draws learners’ attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it (Ellis, 2006).

Stern, H. H. (1992) in his book “Issues and Options in Language Teaching” indicates “a contrastive analysis, just as the comparative linguistics studies, is indeed very important for the second language learner. Therefore translation in one form or another can play a certain part in language learning”.

Brown H.D. (1994), in his Principles of Language Learning and Teaching, states “It does virtually nothing to enhance a student’s communicative ability in the language.”

Cunningham, C. (2000) in the paper “Translation in the Classroom- a Useful Tool for Second Language Acquisition” indicates “while there may indeed be some negative effects from using translation, there is a place in the learning environment for translation. Translation can contribute to the students’ acquisition of the target language, at all levels”.

Austin J Damiani (2003) in his paper “The Grammar Translation Method of Language Teaching” states “As a teacher, I liked using the grammar translation method because I could assume the intelligence of my students; I could talk to them like the intelligent people that they are, and we could talk about the grammar and vocabulary that I was teaching. In another method, I would have had to use simple language and familiar phrases to communicate in the target language, and even then, I could not be sure that my students knew and understood what it was that they were saying.”

IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCH GAP AND PROBLEM

It pays little or no attention to the spoken aspects of the language. Literary language is always considered superior to spoken language while the opposite is the fact. Learners look for mothertongue equivalents of all words of the language they are learning. Grammatical rules and tables of conjugation and declension are taught with much importance. The actual use of language i.e., the practice of the four skills is not done. No need for participatory group or pair work is felt. There is little scope for teacher. It does not pay attention in student–student interactions in the class. As a result, students learn about the language but they cannot use it in real communication. Translation encourages use of mother tongue, which in turn slows down speed in the target language while using it for actual communication. Teacher is the ultimate controller and authority of all learning and teaching activities. He does most of the talking and controls content, materials and pace of the learning process. In other words, he is the dictator. On the other hand, students have very little free will, most of the time they listen. They speak a little. They have little active participation, despite the fact that using a language means using it as an active participant.

EXPECTED IMPACT ON ACADEMICS/INDUSTRY

Curriculum for English Majors requires that grammar teaching should be arranged as part of the program. As one of the required courses, grammar has been taught to English majors in universities and colleges for years. It is known that “grammar is a set of rules that define how words (or parts of words) are combined or changed to form acceptable units of meaning within a language” (Penny, 2000). Guaranteeing the accuracy of the sentences mainly depends on the learner’s mastery of grammar. Grammar, which is an indispensable part of a language, is so important that the teachers and students have always attached great importance to grammar teaching and learning. For the above-mentioned reasons, how to make grammar teaching and learning effective and efficient is an important task for both English teachers and researchers. Although college English teaching and learning research in West Bengal has undergone great changes during the past decades. The current grammar teaching in colleges is still characterized by the adoption of the traditional teaching method, which is known as the Grammar Translation Method. With this model, language structures are presented by the teacher, then practiced in the form of spoken or written exercises, and then used by the learners in less controlled speaking or writing activities. Although the traditional grammar teaching method helps improve the students’ mastery of the grammatical rules, the students cannot use these rules flexibly and appropriately in communication. That is to say, the traditional grammar teaching method has its disadvantages which prevent the students from developing their communicative competence. Firstly, the traditional grammar teaching method is teacher-centered.

As a result, the majority of the classroom time is spent on the teachers’ elaborate explanation of English grammar rules, while all the students are either listening or taking notes. Thus little attention is paid to the development of English communicative competence. The students accept the English knowledge passively in the procedures set ahead of time by English teachers step by step. There is little use of the English language. The typical exercise is to translate sentences from English into Bengali or vice versa, to fill in the blank with a proper word and to correct errors in a sentence. So the students lack English communicative opportunities. Secondly, memorization and rote learning are the basic learning techniques, which cannot help to arouse students’ interest, build their self-confidence or improve their communicative strategies in

English learning and even makes them fear English grammar learning. An alternative to the traditional grammar teaching method is the Communicative Approach. The Communicative Approach makes language teaching as in real-world situation. Grammar learning is emphasized by communication through the approaches of 'learning by doing', through students' participation or co-operative completion of teaching tasks between or among students and teachers, then grammar can be acquired naturally by learners.

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH WORK

The first research aims to discover whether learners in the experimental class can make a significant progress in grammar learning after experiencing an experimental semester. The second research is designed for the purpose of seeing through the experimental semester whether learners in the experimental class can make more progress in grammar learning than those in the control class. The third research aims to find out whether the Grammar Translation Method is more effective in improving learners' learning confidence, and motivation than the Communicative Approach?

In the experiment, two classes were selected from Applied Foreign Language Department as the Experimental Class and Control Class. The achievement of the college admission test showed that they share a similar level of the overall English proficiency. The two classes were taught by the Grammar Translation Method and the Communicative Approach respectively, and they both have grammar lessons three times a week.

MAJOR INPUTS (INFRASTRUCTURE) REQUIRED

Without grammar, words hang together without any real meaning or sense. In order to be able to speak a language to some degree of proficiency and to be able to say what people really want to say, some grammatical knowledge must be grasped. By teaching grammar the teachers not only give the students the means to express themselves, but also fulfill their expectations of what learning a foreign language involves. There are no miracles on the way to learn a language. No matter how students are taught grammatical concepts, syntactic constructions and stylistic

devices, or language conventions and editing concepts, they will not automatically make use of these in their talking. What this thesis intends to focus on is how to improve college students' grammatical competence and linguistic competence through the Grammar Translation Method. Based on the theory of the Grammar Translation Method, this thesis compares the Grammar Translation Method and the Communicative Approach. In order to prove the effect of the Grammar Translation Method, the author of the thesis makes an experiment on her own classes. After one semester's teaching practice, the Grammar Translation Method is proved to be a suitable and successful teaching approach at Applied Foreign Language Department. Firstly, the learners in the experimental class made a significant progress in grammar learning after experiencing an experimental semester. Secondly, learners with the Grammar Translation Method in the experimental class made more progress in grammar learning than those who used the Communicative Approach in the control class. Thirdly, the students' confidence in learning English was improved. Even those who lacked confidence in English in the past have become very active in the classroom activities. Be in the view of college students' actuality in Taiwan, the best way to improve the situation is to combine both the Communicative Approach and the Grammar Translation Method in teaching English Grammar. That is because the Communicative Approach emphasizes fluency and the Grammar Translation Method is concerned with accuracy, fluency and accuracy are the target for English learning.

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