THE STUDY OF GRAMMAR INSTRUCTION FOR COMMUNICATIVE PURPOSE IN HIGH SCHOOLS OF VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT: *A large number of people have wondered how a language could absolutely exist without grammar. Most of them thought that people might communicate with each other by a language without grammar rules or forms. Even after communicative methodology appeared in the 1970s, researchers of grammar had indicated that the grammar should be ignored in teaching language. However, recent studies showed that grammar instruction within communicative contexts could let learners gain high proficiency level, both in accuracy and fluency. Ellis & Celce-Murcia (2002) claimed that learners should be provided authentic discourse samples of the contextually dependent grammatical rules. Florez (1999) emphasized that learners could not speak accurately and fluently without any grammar instruction. Clearly, grammar plays an important role in the progress of language acquisition. In this paper, a report on the application of some ways to teach English grammar for communicative purposes will be fully described. Moreover, the role of grammar instruction in language classroom should be discussed in this paper.*

KEYWORDS: Grammar Instruction, PPP, CLT, Task-based, Interaction, Communication

INTRODUCTION

The researcher was really in a divided mind why most of her students had been difficult to speak a sentence/ an utterance in English even though they had learned for many years. She saw a problem was that teaching techniques that she had used in grammar teaching had not been effective; her students had passively comprehended knowledge, so they were often shy and unconfident when communicating in English. Therefore, she decided to change the techniques when applying the teaching method to draw her students' attention to speaking English more regularly, as well as meeting communicative purposes of a language.

The researcher carried on this study during two years from 2007 to 2009 at three high schools in Hanoi namely Chu Van An high school, Pham Hong Thai high school, and Nguyen Trai high school. 180 students took part in the innovation research. Most of them are friendly with the English subject; they ebulliently attended activities in the class. However, the researcher saw a problem that in most of grammar lessons the students might not express their ideas in English; they were passive while receiving grammar knowledge that the teacher provided. Moreover, they might not apply the target grammar forms, patterns in communicative situations inside as well as outside the classrooms. In addition, six colleagues of the researcher as observers observed the process of innovation in the classroom, and then provided the researcher their opinions and recommendations. They participated in the progress enthusiastically.

LITERATURE

The concepts of grammar

During over 50 years, questions as 'what is the importance of grammar?', 'should grammar be taught?' or 'how grammar should be taught?' have been mentioned in many discussions of language teaching method by linguists, educators and language teachers. Furthermore, grammar's role has been discussed in many language researches of linguists, and thesis and dissertations of linguistics and teaching language.

According to Oxford dictionary, grammar is a component of the language system or in the field of linguistic research. Hence, grammar is a system of sufficient structures of a language or languages in general, which consists of components like **syntax**, **morphology**, sometimes **phonology** and **semantics**. The famous linguist, Noam Chomsky (1957) defined that grammar is the particular analysis on the system or the structure of a language in particular or languages in general.

Methods for Grammar instruction

In the history of language teaching, plenty of teaching methods applied in grammar teaching are **PPP** (Presentation-Practice-Production), **CLT** (Communicative Language Teaching), etc… In the process of research implementation, the researcher just focused on making clear the difference of teaching effectiveness between the PPP and CLT approach.

PPP instruction

PPP stands for Presentation-Practice-Production. This approach lets the teacher instruct grammatical rules, sentence patterns or word formation. As its name, PPP instruction is divided into three phases, as follow:

- **Presentation**: The teacher provides target grammatical knowledge while students listen to, observe and write down. In this phase, the teacher can use a text, a passage, or a picture to describe a grammatical situation. Through that, the teacher refers to grammatical rules/forms, sentence patterns, or word formation, and then writes them on the blackboard as the content of the lesson. This is to help students to know initially about grammar contents that they are being learnt. The teacher also has responsibility to give examples for each grammatical rule, or sentence pattern.

- Practice: During this phase, students have to complete exercises concerned with grammatical content provided in the presentation phase. Typical exercises in this phase can be multiple-choice, gap-and-clue, rebuild sentence, closet-test, etc… In this phase, the teacher governs learners' activities and gives feedback to learners.

- Production: When learners have completely comprehended grammatical contents of the lesson, in this phase they will use them to make oral texts or written texts. Typical activities can be dialogue, short talks, sentence-building, paragraph-building or text-depending on the teacher. The teacher does not take part in, also not correct mistakes until the activity completes.

With PPP approach, grammar teaching becomes easier to teachers, even to inexperienced teachers. However, PPP is considered as a less effective method in English teaching in particular and

languages in general. Many evidences are pointed its major weaknesses. For instance, interaction activities are limited; students are absolutely passive during the presentation phase and complete exercises without consciousness; the teacher does not play role as an instructor or supporter, but a lecturer. That is the reason why students cannot communicate in English in daily situations with just a simple sentence.

CLT Instruction

CLT stands for Communicative Language Teaching. The term refers to classroom language teaching for communicative goals in which communicative competence in target language is addressed. Communicative competence is in difference from grammatical competence. Grammatical competence refers to utilization the language knowledge learnt *(tenses, parts of speech, clauses, sentence patterns, etc…)* to build sentences or complete grammar tasks, whereas communicative competence implies the ability of generating aspects of language knowledge as follow: the capacity of use language knowledge for different purposes and functions; diversifying language based on different settings; comprehending many types of language text in different contexts; producing many types of language text; and especially the ability of maintain communication in spite of limitation of language knowledge. In accordance to Chomsky's, the term ''communicative competence'' refers the ability of use language in social contexts, and the speaker's adjustment of language in such a way that appropriates to social notions. The most important thing of the CLT method is that learners are encouraged to speak in English as much as possible. They may get stuck or mistakes while saying, but it is not important even are fostered to make mistakes because the teacher as a supporter always corrects mistakes by students during the progress of teaching and learning.

Major activities in the CLT instruction include Interaction and Task-based, following:

- Interaction

+ Teacher-student interaction

In the teaching and learning process, the teacher-student relationship; the teacher provides target knowledge while students comprehend them. The teacher-student interaction is one of the activities of this relationship. It is the progress of ask and answer between teacher and students about aspects of a lesson in the classroom. According to Enamul Hoque (2009), classroom interaction is social interaction; teaching and learning occur through that environment, so teacher-student interaction in the classroom is social interaction. He stated that teacher-student relationship is a vital foundation for classroom management; classroom management is a key to help students have high achievement. Clearly, teacher-student interaction may both support students' learning and teacher's management. Especially, teacher-student interaction plays an important role in supporting the progress of grammar teaching and learning because it helps the teacher and students to catch ideas of each other (Enamul Hoque, 2009)

+ Student-student interaction

In accordance with ideas of modern approaches, students are center of teaching and learning activities. Student-student interaction, hence, is the focused activity in the classroom, also the

shortest way for students to master knowledge. Student-student interaction is communication, exchange, and support among students of lesson content or assignment. They may exchange their knowledge, ideas, results/ answers of assignment or support their partners with solutions for their problem.

+ Feedback interaction

Feedback interaction is one of the techniques used to improve the second language learners' grammar abilities. Diana Al-Sibai cited a definition of feedback interaction by the authors: "Feedback interaction refers to various negotiation and modification strategies such as repetitions, clarification requests, confirmation checks," They stated that there are two types of negotiation, including negotiation of meaning used to repair communicative problems (vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, stress…) and negotiation of form used to repair grammatical errors.

- Task-based instruction

For the Task-based instruction, learner will comprehend language knowledge indirectly through assigned tasks. Task-based instruction may make grammatical forms clearer to learners, and even promote learners' awareness of these forms (Nassaji & Foto, 2004). There are three kinds of tasks, as follow:

+ Structure-based production tasks

Learners use the target forms to successfully complete the communicative activities. Teacher will provide some sentences on the board first and ask students to explain some strong points of target grammar

+ Comprehension tasks

Learners comprehend the target forms in carefully structured activities. Learners have to answer some questions related to the forms, so they ensure to understand the meaning of the target forms. For this type, teacher should generally give some sample concerned with the target grammar content, and then ask students to answer some questions to find its form and usage.

+ Consciousness-raising tasks

Learners talk to each other about grammatical forms in activities. Hence, grammatical forms are main content of activities.

METHODOLOGY

Stages of study implementation

The process of the study implementation was divided into four stages:

- Stage 1: Applying the PPP approach (the process of data collection is conducted in 1st six months).

- Stage 2: Applying the CLT approach (the process of data collection is conducted in next six months).

- Stage 3: Making the comparison between students' relevant level on the PPP approach in 1st six months and on the CLT approach in next six months. The relevant levels of students were separated into five levels: normal, much, very much, and few. The terms were used to show the students' attitude: Involvement, Participation, and Contribution.

- Stage 4: Making the comparison of students' achieved outcomes when applying PP and CLT in grammar instruction basing on students' outcomes from the pre-test and the post-test.

Evaluation instrument

Questionnaires
In the research, questionnaires were provided to both the colleagues and the students to evaluate their relevant level on the teaching approaches. Basing the questionnaires, the researcher might evaluate whether the teaching approaches successful or unsuccessful.

Observation
In the research, the researcher and her colleagues who attended the process, observed the class and gave their own ideas through answering questionnaires.

Tests
The pre-test would be conducted in the first six months to assess the consequences of applying the PPP method, while the post-test was performed in the next six months to evaluate the effectives of applying the CLT method. Both were concerned with the grammar contents which the students were learnt (**relative clause, reported speech, gerund, infinitive**). The maximum grade of the test was 10 and the minimum one was 1. The students who gained the mark 7 and above 7 considered as successful and the students who gained the mark under 7 accepted as unsuccessful.

RESULTS
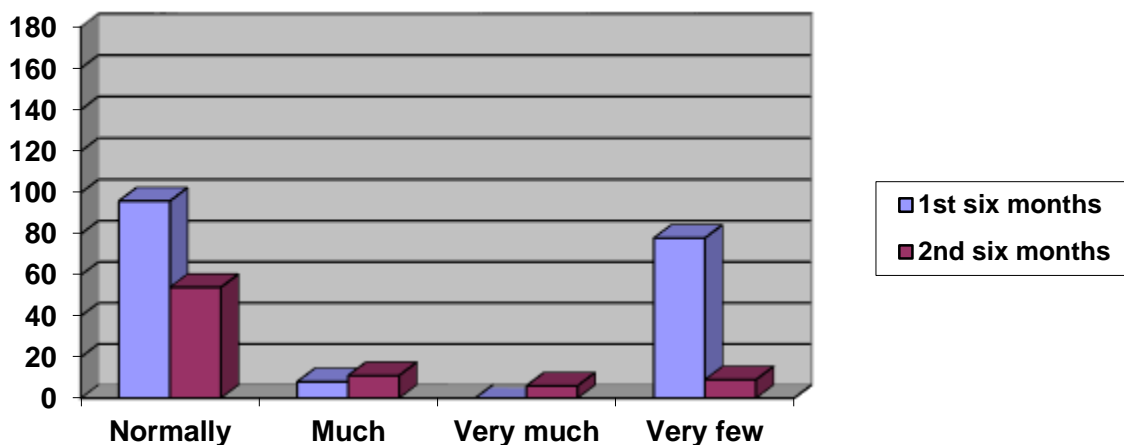
Figure 1: Comparison of the students' attitude between the 1st six months and next six months
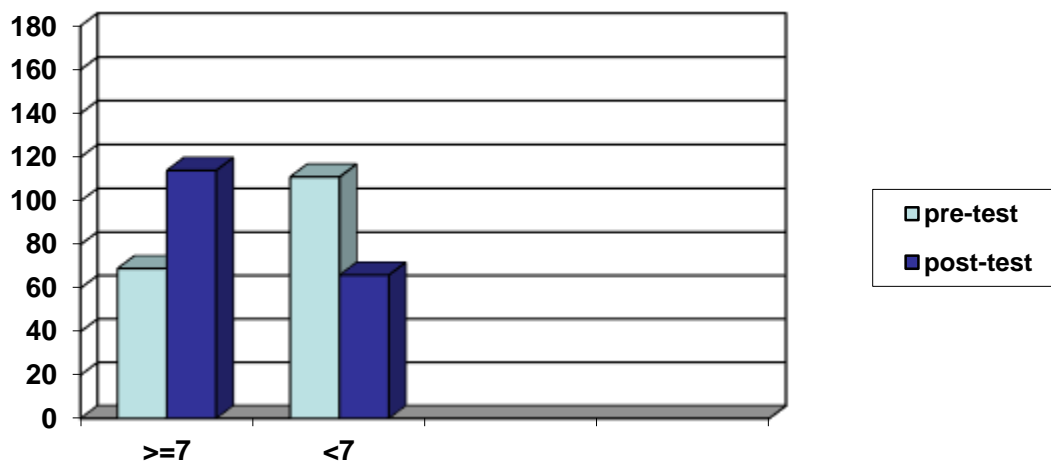
Figure 2: The comparison of the student achievement in the pre-test and the post-test

DISCUSSION

According to the *figure 1,* there was a difference of the students' attitude on grammar teaching and learning activities in the class between the first six months and the next six months. The chart indicated that at the first six months, the students participated not much in the grammar instruction activities compared to the next six months. This means that there was a considerable improvement after the researcher had applied the CLT approach to teaching grammar. The students also felt the ways of teaching grammar that the researcher used in the classroom are appropriate with them, especially interaction activities between teacher and student, and students and students. The innovation brought about constant changes for the better.

In accordance with the results from data analysis, the relevant level of students to the PPP approach was poorer than the CLT approach. Grammar instruction in the PPP approach indicated that a lot of the students were confused when receiving the grammar forms and usage before providing examples. According to the data from questionnaires and colleagues' reflection, nearly all students believed that the way of giving an example and finding the grammar form and usage by themselves might make them more active. Besides, a limitation here was almost students in the class might not use the grammar rules learnt in communication both inside and outside the classroom. After applying CLT approach, the students' attitude on the grammar had a change for the better. According to the evaluation of the colleagues, most of the students in the class enthusiastically participated in grammar teaching and learning activities in the classroom even though they were sometimes shy of making several mistakes while talking, but the teacher immediately correct them. The students in the class permitted that they might comprehend the target grammar forms and usages through interaction activities and tasks. Most of them really wanted to took part in communicative activities with the teacher and other students in the class. Beside this, all of them felt that interaction activities in the class might help them remember well the grammar forms and usages, so they might be really confident to interact with the teacher and other students in the classroom.

In the last stage of the research, the researcher asked the students to do two tests to compare gained outcomes after applying the CLT instead of the PPP. The achievement of the students in the post-test was fairly higher than the pre-test. *(As can be seen in Figure 2)*

The figure 2 presented the dramatically differences of the student achievement in the pre-test and the post-test. According to the chart, the number of students who got the mark seven and above in the post-test increased compared to that of those in the pre-test. As can be seen from the chart, the achievement of the students in the post-test was almost twice as much as that of those in the pre-test. By on the contrary, there was a considerable decrease in the number of students who gained the mark below seven in the post-test compared to that of those in the pre-test. Indeed, the percentage of the students who achieved the mark below seven in the post-test accounted for almost 37%; it had nearly one half of the total of students who had the mark below seven in the pre-test while that of those in the post-test was less one half of the total of students. In general, there was a significant improvement of the achievement of the students after carrying out the innovation research.

Implication to Research

Through the thesis, the author would like to implicate that each teaching method has good or bad points, so the teachers need to be flexible to select suitable teaching approaches in order to meet most effectively and reasonably each lesson's content as well as language focus. It is necessary that the teacher should watch students' inflection on the teaching to get changes to be suited with the students. Besides, the researcher would like to share a message is that students' communicative competence in English will be improved if lessons are designed associated with real situations and familiar events.

CONCLUSION

Generally, the innovation research of the ways of teaching and learning grammar remarkably improved the students' attitude to the participation in the grammar teaching and learning activities in the classrooms. The students zealously attended the interaction activities, especially student-student interaction activity. The researcher and her colleagues evaluated that the interaction is one of the approaches should be regularly used in the language classes because it may bring to the students opportunities to practice language. Moreover, this way may rouse the classroom learning environment and make the student active in perceiving the grammar knowledge. The most important thing is that the students may remember well the grammar forms and usages through grammar teaching and learning activities in the class, and they may apply those in social communication. Besides, the research indicated that grammar lessons that applied the Task-based and CLT approaches brought about particular effectives. The students actively seek out the grammar forms and usages based examples that the teacher provided before the teacher commented. In the process of analysis instruction of the teacher, the students might know mistakes that they had and easily comprehend the grammar knowledge.

Future research

A further research, which the researcher desires to conduct, would be about solutions to improve communicative competence in English towards non-major English students.

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