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The Role of Grammar In Communicative Teaching

Ms. B. S. Gomathi, M.A., M.Phil.

CLT in the Beginning

Communicative Language Teaching as a modern method was first proposed in England in the 1970s. The core concept in CLT is communicative competence “a term Hymes (1971) used to refer to one’s ability to use language in a social context. Savignon (1976) further explains that communicative competence is dependent on the negotiation of meaning between speakers, because communication is spontaneous.

Strategic Competence

The frame work for communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), later modified by Canale (1983) is considered the most influential definition of communicative

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competence for language teaching (Sauvignon, 2002). Speakers need to negotiate meaning based on what is unclear to them. To achieve communicative competence, learners need to be competent in four aspects: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence (Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980; Swain, 1985).

According to Canale (1983) and Canale and Swain (1980), linguistic competence, which is also called grammatical competence, concerns learners' use of lexis, syntax, and structures. Sociolinguistic competence concerns learners' appropriate use of language in different situations and settings. Discourse competence refers to the speakers' ability to form oral and written language appropriately and meaningfully. As suggested by the term itself, strategic competence relates to the use of strategies that can be used to make up for the inadequate abilities in other aspects of competence.

Communicative Competence

Communicative competence involves the social and cultural knowledge. Speakers are presumed to have which enables them to use and interpret the forms of a language (Saville-Troike, 2003). A speaker is said to have communicative competence if he or she knows what to say to whom and how to say it appropriately in any given situation (Schiffrin, 1994). Hymes (1987) claims that communicative competence is made up of four types of competencies.

The **first** competence is linguistic competence referring to speakers' knowledge of grammatical structure in a language. The **second** competence is the knowledge of appropriateness, which is defined as sociolinguistic competence by Canale and Swain (1980). Speakers possessing sociolinguistic competence would produce utterances that are understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on factors such as purposes of the interaction, convention of the interaction, and background of participants (Leung, 2005). The **third** competence, discourse competence, concerned with cohesion and coherence, refers to the knowledge and skill required to combine grammatical forms and meanings to produce different types of spoken or written texts (Leung, 2005). The **fourth** competence, strategic competence, refers to strategies used to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to limiting conditions in actual communication or to enhance the effectiveness of communication. Speakers

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of a language need to acquire all four competences identified in communicative competence in order to speak and act appropriately in a speech community.

The Role of Grammar in Communicative Language Teaching

There is a mixture of beliefs regarding grammar instruction. Some scholars support the exclusion of grammar learning (e.g. Prabhu, 1987), while others emphasize the need to include grammar teaching in Communicative Language Teaching (e.g. Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Nassaji, 2000; Spada & Lightbown, 1993). Krashen's (1982, 1985) hypothesis of acquisition versus learning has had an influence on the notion that focusing solely on meaning is sufficient for SLA.

In his hypothesis, Krashen claims that there is a distinction between acquisition and learning. He believes that acquisition happens naturally, provided that learners receive sufficient comprehensible input, and that only acquired knowledge can lead to fluent communication. Also, Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis proposes that explicit form teaching only serves as a tool for monitoring learners' language. That is, learners learn grammatical rules only to monitor the correctness of their language use, which is in addition to what has been acquired. However, the advocates of explicit grammar instruction argue that it is inadequate to acquire a L2, if meaning is the only focus. Long (1991) differentiates between focus on forms and focus on form. He defines focus on forms as learning grammar rules, and focus on form as drawing learners' attention to grammar in activities and tasks. In the past two decades, some researchers have returned to the investigation of form-focused instruction in CLT (e.g. Celce-Murcia, 1991; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 1993; Long & Crookes, 1992). "Language instruction has long been plagued by an on-going debate concerning the proper role of grammar instruction. Unfortunately, the debate has fostered a dichotomous approach to grammar instruction and a naive view of the nature of grammar. In one approach, the so-called traditional approach-grammatical phenomena are assumed to be wholly amenable to explicit presentation and practice. In the other approach, teachers maintain that such linguistic analysis is largely irrelevant to acquisition. What is all-important is comprehensible input.

While these two approaches are opposites in many ways, they actually share an important commonality—they both are based on a conception of grammar that is monolithic: either grammar can be taught or it can't. Such an either/or conception of grammar that underlies both approaches is equally untenable.

Focus-on-Form Approach

The Focus-on-Form approach, the so-called middle ground between these two extremes, is based on a more realistic conception of grammar as heterogeneous, which is, comprised of qualitatively different phenomena: Some grammar points are axiomatic—easy to describe, easy to apply. Other items are essentially probabilistic statements about language use—difficult if not impossible to apply. Teachers intuitively understand that not all grammar points are created equal and yet there is still a wide-spread one-size-fits all mentality.

Grammar Instruction

Another fallacy that has been fostered by the "great grammar debate" is the belief that grammar instruction is synonymous with explicit techniques. The real problem is that grammar instruction in both approaches is limited to a small set of pedagogical practices. In contrast, a Focus-On-Form pedagogy profitably mixes explicit and implicit techniques depending on the grammar item and the communicative task.

Language Accuracy

The studies on language accuracy of students in bridge courses in Engineering Colleges provide important evidence that form focused instruction is needed. These immersion students received massive amounts of input and had plenty of interaction in the course for a period of time, but their utterances still contained grammatical mistakes. As a result of excluding form-focused instruction, the learners' output lacked in accuracy (Williams, 1995). Despite the negative reports about bridge courses in regard to language acquisition. The students in the course out performed those who learned English as a separate subject in their overall proficiency in English as well as their knowledge of the target language culture (Cummins & Swain, 1986;

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Lessow-Hurley, 2009). Many educators misunderstand focus on form as teaching and learning grammatical rules. However, form-focused instruction does not refer to presenting rules to students.

A number of studies (e.g. Doughty, 1991; Doughty & Williams, 1998; Lightbown, 1991; Trahey & White, 1993; White, 1991) have examined the effectiveness of focusing on form and indicated that students with form-focused instruction outperformed those without instruction on the targeted forms. The results of these studies are very important, because they support the role of form-focused instruction.

Some teachers think that form-focused instruction and communicative activities, where the focus is on meaning, should be separated. Teachers believe that drawing students' attention to grammar, while they are engaging in meaning, may have harmful effects (Lightbown, 1998).

However, some scholars argue that form-focused instruction and communicative activities should be combined. Students can pay more attention to target forms, and the forms become more memorable, if students learn them in context (Foto, 1994; Lightbown, 1998; Nassaji, 2000; Wang, 2009). One way to present grammar communicatively is through structured input activities (Lee & VanPatten, 2003).

Structured input is a type of instruction that directs learners to pay attention to the target language through arranging input from the instruction. These activities are called structured input activities. The basic notion of these activities is how learners encode grammatical forms through meaningful context. The purpose of structured input activities is to raise learners' awareness of the target structures with meaning.

Development of Communicative Competence through Communication Strategies

Most learners learn a modern language best when they are provided opportunities to use the target languages to communicate in a wide range of activities. The more learners use the target language in meaningful situations, the more rapidly they achieve competence. Active use

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of language is central to the learning process; therefore learners must be involved in generating utterance for them. They learn by doing, by trying out languages and by modifying it to serve the communication needs. When a breakdown occurs in communication, learners can call on these strategies in order to:

- ☞ Gain access to further relevant and comprehensible communicative information.
- ☞ Learn by experimenting
- ☞ Learn from mistakes and try again
- ☞ Practice and subsequently use various communication skills
- ☞ Become confident and successful in second language use.

These strategies include requesting clarification, monitoring their own and others performance, using various mnemonic techniques, using inductive and deductive reasoning, practicing sounds and structures sub vocally or aloud and using nonverbal communication strategies.

Communicative Competence for International Communication

As Kasper (1997) points out, "in applied linguistics, models of communicative competence serve as goal specifications for L2 teaching and testing." The notion of 'communicative competence' as applied to language teaching theory (Hymes 1972) needs to be reconsidered for the teaching of English for international communication. Richards et. al. (1985) suggested that a communicative approach foregrounded "communicative competence" as "the goal of language teaching". Working from an ethnographic perspective, Hymes emphasized the way language was used in speech communities, arguing that there were, "rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless." (Hymes 1972, in Brumfit & Johnson 1979). The change of emphasis in language teaching theory, while not always followed in practice, towards a more "communicative" approach was partly dependent on the influence of this view of language.

Appropriateness

An important notion of communicative competence is "appropriateness". Hymes (1980) argued that "appropriateness" was a "universal of speech", related to the social codes of speech communities, what he refers to as "shared understandings of rights and duties, norms of

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interactions, grounds of authority, and the like." For Hymes, communication is "prestructured by the history and ways of those among whom one inquires." Learning to communicate "appropriately" has sometimes been taken to imply learning to fit into a particular way of communicating in a target community. Learning might, for example, have focused among other things on the appropriate use of speech acts as social functions used in particular speech communities, such as how to give and receive invitations or how to apologize. Students' own norms would then be seen as inappropriate, interfering with successful communication in a target culture.

Ideal Ways of Grammar Teaching:

The teachers' perceptions of an effective way to instruct grammar reflect their beliefs about the importance of grammar teaching. Some teachers think that an effective way to teach grammar is to provide students with explicit explanations, examples, and activities related to the grammar points. Some teachers clearly expressed that a communicative way of teaching, such as introducing grammar points through examples and activities, as well as using structured input is an effective method for grammar instruction. The teacher can teach grammar through communicative language teaching method also. In teaching English, one must aim at making them efficient users of the language. This ability to use the language effectively and efficiently depends on one's knowledge of the underlying "Rules" that governs the use of the language. For this purpose, "*grammar*" has to be taught.

Simple Procedures

Various simple procedures may be followed in the teaching of grammar.

- a. Simple black board drawing may be used in teaching the parts of a sentence.
- b. Another way of teaching the parts of a sentence is by means of questioning.

e.g. Shyam wrote a letter.

Who wrote a letter?

What did Shyam write?

The students can be asked to make a list of nouns, verbs, adjectives etc. from their textbook.

- c. Completion exercises may be given. "If Clause".
- d. Dramatization may be used for teaching indirect speech.

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- e. Match-Stick drawing may be used for teaching preposition, articles, adjectives etc.

Methods of Teaching Grammar

a. Deductive Method

Under this method, the teacher starts with rules and definitions and then proceeds to apply them to particular examples and clarify the underlying ideas and implications of the formula and rules.

e.g. Nominal Compounds, If clause etc., simple, compound, complex sentences.

Generally formal grammar was taught by the deductive method.

b. Inductive Method

The teacher proceeds from particular to the general. He presents several examples to the students. On the basis of these examples, he presents certain rules and regulations and explains to the students accordingly. This method is psychological rather than logical. Like from “known to unknown” or “from general to particular”.

For example, the following word picked out from the text may be written on the blackboard.

I	Baby - <u>Babies</u>	II.	Toy - Toys
	City - <u>Cities</u>		Day - Days
	Story - <u>Stories</u>		Key - Keys

In the first set of words, nouns ending with ‘Y’ are preceded by consonants, so it changes the ‘Y’ into ‘-ies’ for plurals. In the Second set of words ‘Y’ is preceded by vowels. So these do not change but only add ‘S’ for plurals.

Under all these, the knowledge of rules is not insisted but the students must work out some exercises to strengthen must workout. Some exercises to strengthen their usage. It has been compared to a vitamin. It is like a medicine, not a form of diet’. Whatever Grammar is taught, it must be functional and cater to the needs of the students in their use of English language.

Conclusion

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The idea of communicative teaching derives from the idea of communicative competence. It aims to facilitate the development of the communicative competence where the learners are engaged in real communication. The role of grammar in communicative teaching proposes that the students should talk to one another and share one another's thoughts and also emphasizes the peer teaching and small group activities.

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