

Critical review for a research article based



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Introduction

English language is the main international English. It is also said that English is the language of progress and development. In this age of internet and globalization, the use of English has increase tremendously. Most of the non-speaking English countries take great importance in English education. China and Malaysia being one of them. Ministry of Education (MOE) in Malaysia has been trying for years to improve the standard of English language especially in communication and writing by implementing efforts such as research on methods that could be applicable in Malaysian schools.

English language has been accorded for second language in Malaysia as stated on Article 152 and been given due attention for years. Teaching English can be declared as challenge in Malaysia because the subject has always been argued, doubted, changed for many times that the issues has never been completely resolved. Meanwhile, MOE keep trying to improvise the teaching and learning process in schools from early education to the highest level by employing suitable means and aids such as bringing in modern teaching methods from Western countries.

Communicative teaching methods and grammar-translation has been discussed, implemented on English language teaching in China based on the article by Jin, Singh, and Li (2005). This paper will provide the critical review of it, and the relevance of the methods in Malaysian Schools.

Comparison Between Communicative Language Teaching and Grammar-Translation

Based on the article by Jin, Singh and Li (2005) the CLT and Grammar-Translation method might not be applicable to all teaching situation.

While the final result of the study was in favour of CLT methods, the gaps between the results on test paper for two groups are low. Furthermore, the research done by Rao (2002) concluded that students claim that using Grammar-translation method will be more suitable for class session in China. Since teaching is deeply rooted in the local philosophy, culture, and basic concepts of education, the students' learning styles and habits in language acquisition must be considered. Although the grammar-translation method is out of favor, students accustomed to this method may still derive benefit from it.

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For example, Chinese students generally show great interest in language structures and linguistic details when they are learning a language. " We would like to know what happens, because if we understand the system, we can use English more effectively" (Harvey 1985). Therefore, in teaching English to Chinese students, appropriate grammar analysis is essential, especially for beginners. Limited utilization of translation from or to the target language is an indispensable part of teaching. Vocabulary work and pattern drills are also ways of familiarizing the student with sentence structures.

This information helps learners acquire linguistic competence. The main features of GT are:

1. It is teacher-centred and does not cater for the learner's individual needs
2. The emphasis is on grammar learning through verb drills, the translation of written texts and the memorization of wordlists
3. The focus is on the product rather than the process of learning;
4. Language is viewed as a body of knowledge rather than an instrument for communicating and functioning effectively in the real world
5. Linguistic practice is confined to the memorization of words and rules
6. Instruction aims at the mastery of the written medium rather than oral communication
7. Accuracy rules over fluency
8. Correction is all-out and punitive
9. The L2-model adopted is elitist and so is the educational philosophy
10. Feedback on learner performance is not likely to be helpful as it is solely accuracy-based. But instead of teaching grammar traditionally and drilling grammar patterns, teachers need to relate teaching grammar and pattern drills to meaning and use.

In other words, language structure practice should be used in contexts that involve some basic principles of appropriateness. This is the exact area that the traditional ESL teaching has long overlooked—teaching English for a communicative purpose. Thus, English teaching should be partly communicatively oriented, so students can acquaint themselves with appropriate language usage.

The main pedagogical principles advocated by CLT are:

1. It is pupil-centred rather than teacher-centred

2. The emphasis is on communication and effective interactional skills
3. The focus is on the process rather than the product of learning
4. Language is viewed as a skill to learn rather than a body of language to pass on to the pupil
5. Linguistic practice occurs through communicative activities
6. Instruction aims at the mastery of all of the four core language skills
7. Fluency rules over accuracy
8. Correction is selective and non-judgmental
9. The L2-model adopted is flexible and can deviate from the L2-standard Form

Relevance to Malaysian Schools

In Malaysia, the teaching of English language starts early, as early as in kindergarten between the ages of 4 to 5.

Students were exposed to many kinds of teaching methods from the traditional approach such as grammar-translation and towards more modern one like CLT. It is common for teachers to support the one that is more effective and theoretically sound basis for teaching. After independence, the changes was made for education in Malaysia where instead of using English language in school, the medium of teaching and learning process changes to Malay. Thus, affecting the teaching methods in Malaysia where teachers will provide materials and lecturers to students and teacher-centred classroom were practiced.

Malaysia introduced the communicative syllabus in 1970. Back then, the study of grammar was considered not 'fashionable' and out of date. Students were not taught how to build correct sentences in English. Too

much emphasis was placed on spoken English. Role-play and how to respond to given situations took centre stage. CLT method is one of the famous methods used by teachers and claimed to be more effective rather than GT. Krashen and other SLA theorists stress that language learning comes about through learning language communication rather than through practicing.

Johnson (1984) and Littlewood (1984) consider that the acquisition of communication competence in a language is an example of skill development. On the other hand, the drawbacks from this method are the need of authentic materials and interaction between learners with them using only the target language as means of communication. Comparing to schools in urban area, most of the schools in rural area lacks the means of these authentic materials and ready interaction from outside. Malaysian people used Malay, Chinese, and Indian to communicate especially in rural area where English has not been used at all.

This in turn will affect the communication grasp of students in rural schools where the proficiency in English are low. Thus, in turn, students will refuse to join in the interaction by being silent and it will hinder the teaching and learning process as they cannot catch up to the class lesson. The students in rural school still depend on teacher translation as their lack of exposition to English language will lower their proficiency. They could not speak the language fluently and need to learn the language structures and understand it from basic and practice by their own.

It is different for students enrol in urban area where they were pre-disposed to the languages already. Most of them start to learn English from child where their cultural environment and socio-economy were contrasting from

students from rural schools. They might have help with their parents and family and the more modern school system in the city. Technologies were blooming in this area where the students' proficiency is slightly higher. Because they might be aware of the language and have practice them, communicative approach can be adapted to their teaching and learning process.

But even so, teachers claimed that practising CLT method in class will take too much time and works as it require complete involvement from all students because of its learner-centred style. Because of this, the lack of practice will somehow affect the learning of the grammar structure and glaring mistakes from students for writing will form as CLT method is divulging more into developing students' communicative approach. Yes, their speaking skill will be better as will their listening skill but that will not promise them 100% correctness in spelling and grammatical uses.

The solutions to this are that both students should try to adapt both methods in learning a second language in Malaysia. The students need to be taught on how to learn not only of the language but to practice the language as frequently as possible. The CLT method can help the students develop an insight into the language and prepare them into an environment where the language are the only one use to communicate. On the other hand, grammar-translation will help the students practice the language on their own where there is no exposition of the language around them.

Teachers can provide materials for these students to facilitate or encourage them to learn it independently without being too dependent on teacher.

Conclusions

Various efforts, on both national and individual levels, have been poured into the strategies to improve students' ability or command of English language. There are of course many methods in second language teaching which include the Grammar Translation Approach. This approach was historically used in teaching Greek and Latin and later modern languages.

Experienced teachers said that if they did not engage the help of the mother tongue, the lesson would involve a lot more time and resulting in students that were indifferent and psychologically were not there. ESL teaching in Malaysia, with its traditional setting, is markedly different from that in the United States and Great Britain in that it is conducted in different social and cultural contexts. Yet this does not mean that the communicative approach is not applicable in such a context. By practicing CLT alone, it might be hard for teachers to attract students to participate and thus wasting time in trying to facilitate them.

So, as to make this approach work well in here, we must reconcile it with the traditional grammar-translation method that is still popularly used in Malaysia.

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