

# **DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE GRAMMAR TEACHING MODEL IN TEACHING PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH-MAJOR TEACHERS**

**Wipada Prasansaph**

*English Department, Faculty of Education, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand*

*E-mail: [wipada.pr@ssru.ac.th](mailto:wipada.pr@ssru.ac.th)*

## **ABSTRACT**

This research reports on the application of communicative grammar teaching model in English to the pre-service English-major teachers. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of communicative grammar teaching model in English on improving students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English grammar. It was conducted in a classroom of thirty fourth-year English-major students of Faculty of Education of sixteen three-hour weekly sessions. The action research method was adopted, involving two cycles of teaching-learning process. The material design for communicative grammar teaching was based on the information that the students gave since the initial reflection stage, the first grammar teaching cycle and the second grammar teaching cycle. The data were collected from the interviews of the students and the students' self-assessment questionnaires. The findings revealed that communicative grammar teaching model improved students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English grammar. The students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English grammar had significantly developed.

Keywords: communicative grammar teaching, teaching model, pre-service teachers, English-major teachers

## **INTRODUCTION**

The context of English teaching in Thailand is EFL (English as a Foreign Language), which means students have most of their exposure to English only inside the classroom – the students are assumed to have restricted opportunities to use English in their daily life. Teaching English in Thailand for the past thirty years has been significant due to the wide use of English in the world society. Though the significance of English is marked, the standard Thai is the medium of instruction at all levels of education in Thailand (Makaramani, 2013). In spite of studying English for six years in primary school and another six years in secondary schools, many students were not able to communicate in English. The major causes of this problem may lie in the emphases of English teaching in Thailand, which are not on encouraging speaking ability. Rather, they are on reading skill and the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary (Wongsothorn et al., 2003). Since most of students rarely have chances to use English in their everyday life, but they have to study it for years, a lot of them are doubtful of the value of learning the language. This is one of the reasons for their lack of motivation. It is also due to the limited use of English in Thai society that teaching methods have focused on reading and grammatical correctness. The teaching of grammar must be very influential in English teaching in Thailand.

It has been controversial for a long time whether English grammar is necessarily taught in the classroom or whether it is better that learners acquire grammar naturally from meaningful input and opportunities to interact through communicative activities. For many teachers, grammar has ever taken anything other than a central role in their classroom methodology (Hedge, 2000: 143). However, Krashen (1982)

proposes the idea that grammatical competence can develop in a fluency-oriented environment without conscious focus on language forms. So, if teachers believe that a focus on grammar is necessary in classroom language learning, how should we integrate grammar teaching into communicative methodology which pays attention to communicative competence? Communicative grammar teaching model has been designed for this reason.

## **LITERATURE AND THEORY**

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) captures the communicative functions that language performs. Language is the system by which meanings are communicated and expressed through various language patterns and purposes. CLT aims to enable students to communicate in the target language both inside and outside the classroom (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). To be able to communicate in the target language effectively, the students need to develop communicative language ability as well as linguistic knowledge. Therefore, they need to be taught how to use the language appropriately in different contexts. So, the communicative approach is relevant in teaching the students in the study because with communicative activities the students are able to practice applying learned grammatical structures to language use in real situations.

Communicative competence (Alptekin, 2002; Hymes, 1971; Netten & Planchat-Ferguson, 1995; Paulston & Britanik, 1995; Widdowson, 1978) is the key concept of CLT. Canale and Swain (1980) propose a definition of communicative competence which covers the knowledge in four areas: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Grammatical competence is focusing on knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and phonology. Developing the learners' ability to take part in the process of communicating through language is the ultimate concern of foreign language teaching. Richards (2002: 6) summarizes the principles of CLT as follows:

- The goal of language learning is communicative competence.
- Learners learn a language through using it to communicate.
- Authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities.
- Fluency and accuracy are both important dimensions of communication.
- Communication involves the integration of different language skills.
- Learning is a gradual process that involves trial and errors.

In order to reach the goal of students' communicative competence, communicative activities need to be applied. Communicative activities such as games, role plays, simulation and problem-solving tasks, give students opportunities to practice communicating in different social contexts and in different roles (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 128; Rao, 1996: 466). Communicative activities should develop a pattern of language interaction where a negotiation of meaning occurs between speakers in pairs or small groups. During the activities the teachers act like an organizer, an advisor, a monitor or a facilitator providing necessary language items and guiding the students' performance (Hedge, 200: 62-63; Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 128; Rao, 1996: 465)

As grammatical competence is viewed as the first aspect to be achieved in communicative competence, this research is an attempt to design the communicative grammar teaching model by following

the 5 basic stages of language teaching: warm up, presentation, practice, production, and wrap up. In the warm up stage, the teacher should bring grammar instruction to life by stimulating in the topic and raising awareness and giving the reason for learning. In the presentation stage, the teacher presents the new grammar point in meaningful context. The teacher may use pictures, diagrams, real objects, or action in order to present the grammar point. In the practice stage, the students practice communicating through games, simulation and role plays. The production stage provides students an opportunity to put grammar to use in real life situations relating students' own contexts. Finally, the students conclude the learned grammar point(s) according to their own comprehension. They may create their own diagrams, pictures or any other forms of visual presentations. The 5 basic stages are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: The 5 basic stages of Communicative Grammar Teaching Model**



## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an action research approach to investigate the value of applying the communicative grammar teaching model to thirty fourth-year English-major students of Faculty of Education at a Thai university of sixteen three-hour weekly sessions. The research was conducted through two cycles of action research spiral of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) for sixteen weeks.

The study began with an initial reflection on the teaching-learning situation. Two grammar points were taught by direct explicit grammar teaching method for four three-hour weekly sessions. The reason for doing this is to figure out the problems that may arise from learning English grammar through the traditional method. The problems discovered at this stage were used as a basis to plan an action for improvement. Questionnaires asking about students' belief and students' initial attitudes towards grammar teaching were applied in order to get the information about their learning styles and learning activities. After that the new model of teaching, communicative grammar teaching model, was designed for implementation in the first cycle. Instructional materials were developed for teaching in the first teaching cycle according to the students' reflections.

The teaching implementation of two grammar points was conducted in class for six weekly sessions. Data were collected from the interviews of the students and students' self-assessment questionnaires. Reflections on the lesson taught provided for implications for improvement in the next action step. The instructional materials for the second teaching cycle were designed according to those reflections from the students.

Another two grammar points were taught in class for six weekly lessons. The activities and materials used in the second teaching cycle were based on the reflections from the first teaching cycle. Data were collected from the interviews of the students and students' self-assessment questionnaires at the end of the teaching.

## RESULTS

The findings of the study from the initial reflection stage, the first teaching cycle, and the second teaching cycle are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Summary of the findings**

<b>Initial Reflection Stage</b>
<b>Questionnaires about students' belief</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grammar is the most important part in English teaching and learning.</li> <li>• Students have to study grammar in order to be good at communication.</li> <li>• The teacher has to correct all students' grammatical mistakes.</li> <li>• Grammar points can be effectively taught through teacher-centered instruction.</li> <li>• Grammar should be learned through songs, games, role plays, dramas, and competitions.</li> </ul>
<b>Students' initial attitudes towards grammar teaching</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students have negative attitude towards learning English grammar. (boring, hard to understand, a lot of rules to memorize)</li> </ul>
<b>First Teaching Cycle</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students have more confidence in speaking English.</li> <li>• Students feel that their grammar knowledge has been improved.</li> <li>• Students enjoyed learning grammar.</li> <li>• Students are able to apply grammar knowledge in their communication.</li> <li>• Students like learning grammar through pair work and group work.</li> <li>• Students want to learn English grammar through songs, games, role plays and drama.</li> </ul>
<b>Second Teaching Cycle</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students have more confidence in speaking English.</li> <li>• Students feel that their grammar knowledge has been improved.</li> <li>• Students enjoyed learning grammar.</li> <li>• Students are able to apply grammar knowledge in their communication.</li> <li>• Students like learning grammar through pair work and group work.</li> <li>• Students like learning grammar through songs, games, role plays and drama.</li> </ul>

From the initial reflection stage, the researcher designed the communicative grammar teaching model according to the 5 basic steps: warm up, presentation, practice, production, and wrap up by adding songs, games, role plays and drama. After teaching the first teaching cycles, the self-assessment questionnaire and the interview were used to collect data. The interview session reflected the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching and learning activities. Thus, the second teaching cycle was designed according the reflections after the first teaching cycle.

## CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

There were changes in students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English grammar throughout the study. From the initial information gained from the questionnaires, students had negative attitude towards learning grammar. However, later on during the study, the students viewed themselves become better in English grammar as well as English communication. From their self-assessment, they gained more

confidence in applying English grammar in communication. Moreover, the communicative grammar teaching helped create the group working skills among students.

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