THE USEFULNESS OF SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL GRAMMAR AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS IN ESL CONTEXT

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Abstract

As globalization spreads investigation of the teaching of English grammar in the ESL/EFL context is of critical interest to learners. This comparative study examined the place of grammar in the ESL context; described the kind of grammar that is used by teachers to design teaching activities in ESL classes; and discusses the implications for English grammar teaching with regards to the investigator's own experiences. Data was collected by recording observations of teaching methods during ESL Cookery lessons, using a notebook and pen. The two teachers of the class were also interviewed. The results showed that the chosen grammatical teaching strategies were effective in this classroom in that they engaged students in interactive and contextual learning.

Keywords: Systemic Functional Grammar, Students' communicative skills

Introduction

The usefulness of Systemic Functional Grammar and its impact on students' communicative skills in ESL context

An understanding of how teachers are utilizing grammar to design teaching activities can inform the education community as to best practices. Improvement of students' communicative capacities appears to be linked to teaching delivery. Current research highlights the importance of reflective writing practices by teachers, to be aware of their learning style and areas for development. Moreover, how teachers employ the style of grammar chosen can enlighten educators as to alternative ways of enhancing meaning-making in student's learning experiences.

The following paper will demonstrate the direct positive impact a teacher's curriculum design can have on student learning of ESL grammar. Firstly, the teaching context for this study will be outlined. Secondly, a literature review will be provided to place the research in a larger body of work. Following, an analysis of one of the teacher's responses to three registers of systemic functional grammar will be described, to identify how each of these are specifically applied to the teaching of grammar. Finally, a conclusion will summarise the main points of this paper to show the necessity of ESL teachers to focus on how grammar strategies are taught. Ultimately, it is anticipated that this research will inform ESL teachers as to better practices to enable the effective development of communication skills amongst ESL students.

The context of this study is a cookery/ESL class at Thebareton Senior Collage, located in Western Adelaide. The college is the only adult New Arrivals Program provider in South Australia. The students here tend to be young adults who have returned to studies to complete their secondary education. They undertake bridging or vocational programs and learn English as part of the New Arrivals Program.

The ESL program is designed for students to develop their skills to live and work in the Australian community. Participants in the study attend Bareton Senior College, and the students who are from diverse ethnic backgrounds have obtained an ESL score between 0 and 4. The ESL course is offered as eight lessons per week and includes one lesson of computing. The students carry out regular tasks based on everyday activities, such as cooking. The course content includes:

• Improving grammar

• English for work

• Computing for English

• Pronunciation

• Learning to learn skills

• Reading, spelling and writing skills

The Program doesn't have any accreditation or formal assessment but leads to eligibility for subjects in a Certificate in English Proficiency. Graduates from this program are encouraged to continue their college enrollment in subsequent programs, such as the preparation for senior studies, other foundation or bridging programs, or to complete a vocational certificate.

Intensive support is provided by the College for recent arrivals and students learning English. Learning support is provided at all levels and preparatory programs are in place in all curriculum areas to facilitate students' transitions into further study or the workplace.

Additionally, the ESL teachers at the College have a great deal of flexibility in creating their own teaching materials as long as they keep within the curriculum guidelines. Apart from teaching experience already gained, the teachers benefit from regular professional development courses to aid in the design of their own teaching materials. The New Arrivals Program classes usually have two teachers.

Main Text:

Literature Review

In education, as in most professional fields, teaching methodologies are hot subjects of debate that take their place on the center stage. Head-turning statements tend to be in fashion, only to fade quickly to the dimly lit theater wings of history. Currently, the teaching of grammar in the ESL context is one such hot topic that is now in the spotlight and a variety of acclaimed methodologies abound for best teaching practices. Investigators are forceful and swift to oppose one another. For example, the June 1999 issue of the *Canadian Modern Language Review* printed an article titled "What's Wrong with Oral Grammar Correction?" by J. Truscott (cited in Taber, 2006). Readers barely have time to catch their breath before turning to the follow-up article in the same volume by Lyster et al: "A Response to Truscott's 'What's Wrong with Oral Grammar Correction'."

Moreover, another researcher insists that educators should "trash tradition" and take out grammar lessons altogether (Schuster, nd, p. 518 cited in Taber 2006). Another advocates that, "Students [must learn to] identify the eight parts of speech and learn the rules for their use" (Manning 1994, cited in Taber 2006). The incompatible views continue in education in the field

of second-language acquisition and language development. Investigators such as Lyster (cited in Taber 2006) points out that,

> Considerable evidence has accumulated that much grammar acquisition
>
> occurs in a relatively fixed order; learners are not able to master one aspect
>
> until they have mastered certain others (p.462).

Nunan (cited in Taber, 2008) opposes this fact, saying that, "It is simply not the case that language learners acquire target items perfectly, one at a time" (p.101). There is rising confirmation that teaching systemic functional grammar can be advantageously applied to natural language processing (Couchman & Whitelaw, 2003; Munro, 2003). Furthermore, literature points to an interaction between systemic functional linguistics and natural language generation (Matthiessen and Bateman, 1991).

However, there is currently a lack of computational SFG (Systemic Functional Grammar) resources. There is no norm or standard format for machine readable annotation, no annotated corpora, and no useable parsers. What's an English teacher to do? When ESL teachers come to the teaching of grammar in their course they find that there is a number of different kinds of grammar are available. For educational purposes these can be carefully divided into three groups: Traditional grammar, Formal grammar and Systematic Functional grammar.

Types of Grammar

Cope (1993) states that Traditional grammar is inherited from the Greeks and Romans. It was passed down through the centuries as a way of helping scholars learn Greek and Latin and so accessed knowledge that was stored in ancient texts and in the contemporary Latin texts of the time. During the Renaissance period Latin was the language of international scholarship in Europe. Also during the Renaissance era Traditional grammar was applied to vernacular languages such as English, and began to be used in schools. In eighteenth century England the use of grammar was an important issue, since English dialects were often so different that speakers from different parts of the country, or from different social classes, could not understand one another. Thus, Traditional grammarians were concerned with establishing a standard written English language shared across speakers of different spoken dialects.

The main thing that Traditional grammar set out to teach was the parts of speech, or what linguists would refer to centuries later as the names of word classes; noun, verb, adjective,

adverb, preposition, conjunction and so on (Cope, 1993). Parts of speech tend to be defined semantically, such as a noun is the name of a person, place or thing; a verb is an action word and so on. However, Christie 1981 (cited in Cope, 1993) describes Traditional grammar as a "jail" for teachers who teach this kind of grammar, because those teachers will be bound to teaching language structure without any reference to the learning context. Traditional grammar continued to be taught until the progressive education movement came to a rise in schools globally in the 1970s and a Formal grammar style was developed and became rapidly popular.

Like Traditional grammar, Formal grammar looks at classes of words, including classes of phrases. Formal grammar is concerned with description of the structure of individual sentences. Formal linguists are strongly influenced by the work of Noam Chomsky. Beginning in 1950s, Chomsky (cited in Cope, 1993) created a revolution with Formal linguistics by showing how the grammar of a language could be represented as a kind of algebra; an abstract list of rules such as those used by the mathematicians or logicians. Chomsky 1965 (cited in Cope, 1993) argued that these rules could be used to explore the limits of language, and that limitations were neurological in origin. Unlike animals, Chomsky suggested, humans were born with an innate language faculty, and it was the job of formal linguists to find out just what this faculty was.

This enterprise excited the interest of linguists around the world and preoccupied linguists for more than a generation (Cope, 1993, p. 139). Hence, Chomsky's theory views grammar as a set of rules which allow or disallow certain sentence structures. Knowledge of these rules is seen as being carried around inside the mind of each person. Ultimately, more so than Traditional grammar, Formal grammar concentrates on structure, that is the way in which classes of words and phrases are combined. Through this period of teaching both types of grammar some linguists, were thinking to generate one more developed grammar which is Functional Systemic Grammar (Halliday et al, cited in Cope, 1993). Unlike the Formal linguists, who were mainly interested in the relationship between grammar and mind, Functional linguists were more sociological in orientation, such that they were more concerned with relating grammar to its function within society.

Throughout this period Functional linguists have pursued a range of complementary interests with regards to best practices of teaching grammar. For example, globally, educators have been strongly influenced by the work of Michael Halliday, Professor Emeritus of Linguistics at the University of Sydney. Unlike Formal linguists, Functional linguists have   generally dedicated

themselves to addressing practical concerns of the application of grammar. Thus, Functional grammar seeks to solve problems such as using words "in context" (Halliday et al 2004).

This has led Functional linguists to develop semantically oriented grammars which show how people use language to make meaning in order to navigate their social on their lives (Cope 1993, p. 139). To be familiar with such a kind of grammar three registers need to be understood by teachers; field, mode, and tenor. The field is the social action in which the grammar is embedded, in other words, what is going on in a particular setting of space and time. It also includes what the interaction is about (the subject matter) and what the participants know about it (shared knowledge).

Tenor is the relationship between the participants, which is visualized as a continuum of formality (from most casual to most formal). The social situation heavily affects the level of formality in a context, for example the acceptability and appropriateness of words, phrases and actions according to the different situations. The mode is concerned with the role played by language in the context; what exactly is the language trying to achieve. The mode includes the channel employed (spoken or written). A number of possible situations arise within a context through the opposition of mode; written texts can be read in silence or aloud, spoken texts can be spontaneous or prepared, and so on (Eggins, 1994).

Language choices are obviously affected by the register variables because they reflect three main functions of language. Halliday (1994 cited in Martin et al., 1997) states these to be; ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions. Ideational function uses language to represent experience. It is realized in field through the transitivity patterns of the grammar. The interpersonal function uses language to encode interaction and to create interpersonal relationships. This is realized within tenor through the mood pattern of grammar used. The textual function uses language to organize information into a coherent written or spoken text which is realized in mode through theme patterns of grammar (Eggins 1994, p 78). Accordingly, if choice of word or grammar pattern is changed, frequently the meaning of the language spoken or written will be different too.

Grammar Teaching Strategies

Breen (2000) states that because teachers are anticipated to know what learners are not expected to know, the culture of the classroom insists upon asymmetrical relationships. The

duties and rights of teacher and learner are different. Moreover, both teacher and learner may be regularly disinclined to upset the asymmetry of roles and identities to which these duties and right are assigned. In most societies, an egalitarian relationship between teacher and learner is a contradiction of what a classroom should be. Learners give a teacher the right to adopt a role and identity as that of the teacher. And a teacher has to earn particular rights and duties in the eyes of the learning group.

It is true that 'All societies are unequal, but some are more unequal than others' Hofstede 1980, p. 136 cited in Kasuya, 2007). In other words, inequality exists in every culture; however the degree of the tolerance is different in each society (Brown, 1994 cited in Kasuya 2007). From this perspective, teachers and learners are very familiar with the experience of gradually establishing the precise degree of asymmetry which enables them to continue a relatively harmonious working group. Teachers are also familiar with relationship interactions that erode learning experiences, such as the classroom which is overly democratic or too authoritarian.

Pennycook (2000, p. 93) points out that, 'The classroom functions as a kind of microcosm of boarder social order'. The relationship of the classroom to the outside world is a reciprocal one; the classroom is not determined by outside world, but it is part of the world, both affected by what happens outside its walls and affecting what happen within it. Pennycook points to the need to understand that there is a complex interplay between classrooms and the outside world. Such that classrooms are not so much reflections of the outside world, rather they are a part of the culture that makes up the outside world, and in fact play a role in how that outside world operates. From this perspective, the walls of classroom becomes permeable, with the social relations outside classroom affecting what goes on inside, and social relations inside affecting what goes on outside.

Another important topic when investigating grammar teaching is that of field. Field is defined as the situational variable that has to do with the focus of an activity in which the people are engaged (Eggins, 1994). Sometimes field is defined as the topic of the situation, but Martin's boarder definition in terms of institutional focus, or social activity type is more useful to capture the field in situation where language is accompanying in action (1984, cited in Eggin 1994). The field of the sentence is the focus of the activity that the sentence is involved in.

The experiential meaning is realized firstly by using the transitivity of the verbal and it demonstrates linguistic implications corresponding to situational variation. For example, its

experiential meaning will be different if the speaker said 'could you report to me the meaning of diary before the end of the lesson? The experiential meaning changes because 'report' is a more technical answer referring to corresponding changes in a situation, that is, the speaker's need to be more technical, requiring not only the answer but also detailed information.

Secondly, its ideational meaning is realized by utilizing the transitivity of verbal processes 'tell'. However, if the situation is changed to an informal context, such as an interaction between friends or spouses, the speaker may use another register such as polite.   Therefore the changing of the field has had a very immediate and significant impact on the text, particularly on the content words used (Eggins, 1994, p. 68).

An effective grammar teaching strategy is that of scaffolding. As students become more proficient with the language, the scaffold is gradually removed (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2002, p. 85 cited in Bradley 2004). Alternatively,

> Scaffolding refers to providing contextual supports for meaning
>
> through the use of simplified language, teacher modeling, visuals
>
> and graphics, cooperative learning and hands-on learning
>
> (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003, p. 345).

Thus the teacher of second language learners has to facilitate learning through support.

Three types of scaffolding have been identified as being especially effective for second language learners (Bradley, 2004):

1. Simplifying the language: The teacher can simplify the language by shortening selections, speaking in the present tense, and avoiding the use of idioms. Alternatively, using field.
2. Asking for completion, not generation: The teacher can have students choose answers from a list or complete a partially finished outline or paragraph.
3. Using visuals: The teacher can present information and ask for students to respond through the use of graphic organizers, tables, charts, outlines, and graphs.

The development of academic language is vital to student success in the classroom. Each of the content area subjects for the College's program contains unique and demanding technical vocabulary. Familiar words are used in completely different ways, such as in the context of cooking. And active student involvement is the key to success.

When the goal is to prepare students for academic success in classes taught in English, then ESL is best taught through lessons that teach meaningful mathematics, science, social

studies, and language arts concepts simultaneously with second language objectives (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003, p. 310 cited in Bradley 2004).

> The overriding drive in current changes occurring in second
>
> language teaching is the need to teach language through something
>
> essential and meaningful to the student (cite, date).

This drive supports efforts toward planning thematic instruction, another effective grammar teaching strategy. Theme studies provide a meaningful context for learning technical, academic vocabulary.

Another aspect of meaning making in language construction is that of mode. The mode refers to how language is being utilized in the interaction to realize the meaning of the context. Eggins (1994) states that the general definition of mode is simply, 'The role language is playing in an interaction'. This role is different according to the possibilities of immediate feedback between the interactants. According to Eggins (1994, p. 53-55) meaning through mode can be determined by two kinds of distance;

1) Choice of the theme

2) Choice of rhyme of the sentence

To sum up, the spatial/interpersonal distance and experiential distance between interactants in a social situation determines the choices of mode and meaning.

Richard and Lockhart (1994 cited in Kasuya, 2007) stated that second language learning is recognized as a highly interactive procedure. Through interaction with the teachers and other students within the classroom and during small group tasks, students have the opportunity to practice their linguistic abilities. Brown states that 'interaction is the heart of communication' and that 'the best way to learn to interact is through interaction itself' (1994 cited in Kasuya, 2007, p. 159). Breen (2000) conceptualises the language class as an inherent series of metalinguistic interactions. As a language class entails a process of continual juxtaposition between interaction about language and interaction through language.

It is often assumed that the language class can provide opportunities for genuine interaction through the use of new language codes. The fact that second language acquisition depends, at least partly, on the quantity of meaningful interactions and communicative practices, learners are able to engage in relatively high levels of language proficiency. This is critical as learners need to seek ample opportunities to use the L2 in and outside of the classroom.

However, Ellis points out those second language learners who have rich opportunities for interactive and communicative practice need also to receive some degree of form-focus instruction (2002 as cited Kris, 2007). Second language teaching within the classroom tends to offer better and safer opportunities to practice communicative skills and build up L2 confidence, as compared to solitary learning in the outside the world. In addition, ESL learners may also be offered more high-quality input, output opportunities within a classroom context.

Teacher-student interactions play an important role in contemporary classrooms of the 21st Century. Views of learning and pedagogical application have begun to change traditional classroom interaction patterns, shaping the communicative roles of the teacher and students as participants into a learning community (Lopez, 2005). Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) sets the foundations for many pedagogical practices in today's schooling (1978 cited in Lopez, 2005). ZPD is defined as the learning that takes place when a novice is assisted by or collaborates with a more experienced person. Although this socio-cultural theory is not new in relation to cognitive and linguistic development, it is relatively new in its application to the analysis of second language acquisition (Schinke-Llano, 1995 cited in Lopez 2005).

Vygotsky's theory asserts that learning occurs through dialogical interaction between a novice (e.g., a student) with the assistance of an expert (e.g., a teacher). With regards to second language acquisition, the significance of his theory lies in the emphasis of the learning process being shifted from assessing the student's performance to assessing the amount of help s/he needs. That is, instead of focusing on exams to assess students' performance, language teachers can implement a set of re-writing tasks from which students with a need for additional help can benefit (Lopez 2005).

Furthermore, Vygotsky described each stage of the learning process as inclusive of the previous stage. He also addressed the non-linear nature of learning, in which students both progress and regress as they learn (Schinke-Llano, 1995 cited in Lopez 2005).

Post-Vygotskian teaching and learning as assisted performance has become a valued strategy in language teaching (Lantolf, 2000). An example of this is the process of guided participation wherein learning arises through both deliberate guidance of the learner by a more capable other (Rogoff, 1990 cited in Kumbulain & Wary, 2001). Students can also learn incidentally, through participation in collective activities with other members of a learning

community (Kumbulain & Wary, 2001). The central focus of these language teaching strategies is *calibrated* assistance to provide interactional support.

The Study's Focus

The focus of this project study is; to determine the place of grammar in the chosen ESL classroom; to identify which features of grammar teaching do the teachers focus on; and to determine the overall value of chosen grammatical teaching strategies. Thus, the focus questions for the project were;

1. How is grammar viewed and incorporated into activity design with the purpose of improving learner outcomes?
2. Does utilization of systematic functional grammar influence have a positive or negative influence on students' communication skills?
3. How do the teachers perceive teaching the differences between traditional and systemic grammar in relation to communicative skills improvement?
4. Which kinds of teaching methodologies are used by the teachers to make the impact of teaching systemic grammar more effective on the improvement of students' communicative skills?
5. To what extent the relationship between teachers and their students impacts students' communicative skills?
6. What kind of impact dose the macrocontext have on microclassroom?

Method

Participants

The two teachers of the ESL cookery class were the participants in this study; a cookery teacher and an ESL teacher. Each one of these teachers has a key role in this class. The first teacher to be mentioned here (to be known as TE and the main focus will be on her response) is the home economics teacher; TE is teaching the students cookery and has been as a teacher for 34 years. TE has taught in special education in Sydney before transferring to South Australia four years ago.

The other teacher (to be known as TL) is a literacy teacher. His role in this class is to support TE by helping the students to comprehend new vocabulary. Often, the TL will write words and phrases on a whiteboard during the class to aid student learning.

Materials

This project used a notebook and pen for the investigator to record classroom observations and to make notes during the in-depth interviews of the teachers. Minichiello (1990) states that to go about doing in-depth interviews there are no fixed rules, there are no standard procedures, so the quality of the interview depends very much on the skill of the interviewer. At the being of the interview; the participant was thanked for agreeing to the meeting. Rapport was established between the researcher and the participant through light conversation about daily life and studies in general (p. 111).

The interviews were conducted in order to explore the teacher's views on teaching systematic functional grammar in relation to the improvement of student's communicative skills. The interviewees were given a chance to respond to interim analysis of the observation data. Interviewees were asked if they have any added information to what they have already provided via observation of their teaching methods.

Procedure

Unfortunately, only 12 of the 20 students in the class eligible to participate in this study showed up on the day. The students came from diverse backgrounds; Sudan (2), Afghanistan (2), Pakistan (1), Rwanda (1), Bhutan (1), Cambodia (2), India (1), Vietnam (1), and Burundi (2). Across Adelaide the students are from all parts of the greater metropolitan area, but particularly from the central and north western regions.

Classroom observations and teacher interviews were conducted in the last term of the 2009 academic year. Transcription of the interviews and observation data were completed by the end of term; a total period five to six weeks.

Data

Notes/audio-tape transcript of interviews and observations made up the raw data for this study. A full record of the interview was complied as soon as possible after the interview (Patton, 2002), with reference to notes taken during the interview, were the researcher not to do this the nature of the explanations may be lost. The interviews will be recorded using a notebook that

will be fully transcribed for analysis (Ghauri, et al, 1995; Turell, & Moyer, 2008). Themes were drawn from each set of data and the most frequent themes will be reported in the final report.

Results and Discussion

Classroom Observation

TE was the lead teacher for the home economics class; she controlled the class by initiating question asking of students. After she asked a question and she would give her feedback to whole class. By doing so, she conducted an asymmetrical social feature. This reflected the unequal power relationship between her and the students (Breen, 2000). Also, at the very beginning of the lesson, TE started checking the names of students to see whether anyone absent or not, then she asked one of the students who was away last week, '*You didn't attend last lesson, why?*' This kind of teacher behavior reflects the authority of the teacher in the classroom and it is a sign to the student that it is the teacher who is the controller of the classroom.

When TE spoke like this she put herself in the position of judging. This is a very clear example of the unequal relationship between the teacher and students. In this way, the students were looking at her as someone who is going to be there to judge the quality of their expression.

Additionally, TE said, '*I always encourage students to laugh and feel free asking me anything you want*'. Furthermore, she asked the students to call her by her first name. She said, '*Many times students call me 'teacher' because they use this word in their home country, but many times I have said to them that they can just call me by my first name, there is no need to use this kind of [formal] word*'. TE further stated that, '*All these things will encourage them to keep them communicative with me*'.

The field of this class was the cookery tasks within the classroom observed in this study. TE used an everyday field language so that the language learnt would be familiar to the students. For example, she used verbs and nouns likes *recipe, cook*, *and can* (when she asked one of her student *can you please tell me the meaning of diary*. Another example of the use of field is when TE asked the class about definition of ingredients, 'C*an someone explain to me what ingredients are?* This was a casual form of the question, using familiar every day language. The technical form of the question would be, '*Can someone report to me what ingredients are?* For this reason, when a student answered that ingredients are '*materials*' that TE responded with, '*No that more like science, can we make it like cookery*'. Thus, TE has designed this class to scaffold her students learning.

The theme of the focal sentence is '*Could you tell me*', which is a typical theme providing a cohesive link back to previous discourse and forward to new information (Martin et al. 1997, p. 25). Such a theme gives immediate feedback as the listener can say; '*Yes I can answer*' or '*Sorry, I can not answer you*'. Here the language is used to inquire about information.

A casual chat between TE and a student was one observed example of mode. There was both visual and aural contact to provide a 'spoken mode. This mode was utilized by TE to encourage her students to interact with her as well as their peers.

Another observation within the cooking class was when TE elicited the definition of the word '*dairy*'; which had been taught in the last lesson. At one point, she asked one of the students, '*Can you spell this word for me?*' The student spelled another word which had a completely different meaning and pronunciation from the target word. Instead, the student spelled and pronounced '*diary*' when the student did this, TE said '*Good*' in response to the contribution of the student. She then asked again if, 'Does a*nyone know this word?*' Another student gave an approximate answer and the teacher responded by defining '*dairy*'.

She then asked the students to give her some examples of using the word '*dairy*', and to note the differences between the word, '*diary*' and the target word *'dairy'*. This form of teacher feedback is educational in that students receive a detailed explanation for both of these words through the use of clear and simple examples. After her explanation, TE started eliciting the right answer from the students. This activity demonstrated the developmental nature of mediation in which any type of assistance is useful (Vygostky, 1987 cited in Lantlof, 2000).

The teacher initiated asking grammar questions of students by asking for an explanation of the target word diary. By doing this, TE demonstrated again that she is the controller of the classroom because she asked the question and at the same time she gave her feedback to students, by saying '*Good*' or '*That was very good*' or '*That was excellent*'. The students did not give such feedback to the teacher. At the same time, the teacher exploited student's errors to facilitate language learning. TE allowed errors to occur and treated them as an instance to learn from rather than to avoid. Furthermore, TE encouraged students to participate interactively by balancing her negative feedback with positive appraisals. By doing this, she keep her students communicating. Further, she allowed students sufficient time to formulate their thoughts and tried to be supportive whenever students faced a communication breakdown (Kris, 2007).

Teacher Interviews

In the interviews of the two teachers, both mentioned their roles in encouraging students to interact with them as well as their peers. TE said that:

> *I always encourage my students to communicate with each other*
> *and with the teachers to improve their communicative skills, I ask*
> *them many times to read a recipe, and I or the ESL teacher will*
> *help them if they face any difficulties in their reading. After they*
> *finish their reading I try to interact with them by asking some questions.*

This kind of teaching methodology is used by the teachers to make the impact of teaching systemic grammar more effective on the improvement of students' communicative skills by keeping her students interacting most of the lesson time.

Also in the interview with TE she said that, '*Sometimes the relationship between the teacher and students should be formal because we are here to teach the students not just for laughing otherwise the students will learn nothing*'. In Australia, the unequal relationship between the teacher and students seems to be less unequal than the society which the investigator is familiar with (i.e., Iraq). So in this case, the classroom context reflected the real world context of Australian society which helps the students to be effectively communicative with their teachers and peers as well.

Additionally, in the observed class, the students interacted with the teachers and other students more actively and freely as compared to their home countries. That is, the teacher allowed students to have more freedom than the student's would likely have experienced in their home countries. An example of this was when TE tried to engage with the students' self-reliance and creativity by asking them to prepare a recipe by themselves. Other examples of equality of relationship between the teachers and students included;

- The teachers being friendly to the student's throughout the class.
- The teachers encouraged the students to address them on a first-name basis.
- The teachers used polite speech with students (e.g., '*Could you...*' and '*Can you please...*').
- When the students had questions, they were allowed to ask them at any time in the class.

All of these examples demonstrate a democratic culture within the learning community under observation. In turn, this culture reflects the democratic values of wider Australian society. It can be assumed here that most of the students, given their non-Western ethnic and cultural backgrounds, would be more familiar with a classroom (and wider culture) in which inequality of relationships between teacher and students (any in authority) was more the norm.

Reflections on the topic

Whether and to what degree teaching systemic grammar influences the improvement of communicative skills remains controversial issue (Halliday, 2004), and this interests me as a student/teacher of ESL. I am motivated to explore the issue with particular regards to teaching grammar, as I am an English teacher who used to teach Traditional grammar in my home country. Furthermore, identification of which kind of grammar teaching can be used to produce positive communication outcomes for ESL students is useful knowledge for teachers and curriculum development.

I hope this project study identified areas for focus within the curriculum the College for the study context. The potential benefits to the participants are improvements the teaching and learning of grammar. Furthermore, enhancing the awareness of teachers as to the types of grammar they are teaching and its effects on ESL student learning may counter the negative influences of teaching traditional grammar.

Recommendations of Grammar Teaching Strategies

This paper has recommended that the grammar can be embedded in the classroom activities or the conversation that have been occurred between teachers and their students or among the students themselves. That is mean; there is implicit grammar learning.

The implicit approach is one by which students should be exposed to grammatical structures in a meaningful and comprehensible context in order that they may acquire, as naturally as possible, the grammar of target language (Scott 1990).

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that effective grammar teaching strategies for second language acquisition exist, and hinge on interaction and contextual learning. Therefore, the premise of using a curriculum based on themed native-speaker responses to questions is deemed worthy of further research. According to Hallidayan principals, the main core of a second language lesson should be meaningful communication. Meaningful communication gives a motive for students to be invested in the learning progression. Therefore, it is crucial to have a good theme on which to base meaning exchange (giving and listening to opinions). The language used to communicate meaning need not be analysed on strict SFG patterning as this would be inappropriate.

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