

Grammar Learning Strategies Applied to ESP Teaching

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Abstract—There are difficulties in learning ESP because of the characteristics of ESP and learners' low grammatical competence. Grammar knowledge plays important roles in cultivating grammar competence, especially for ESP learning. There is the connection between grammar and learning strategies. Cognitive approach (deductive and inductive learning), communicative approach, and drills are beneficial to grammar learning. ESP grammar learning strategies can be classified into cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies for learning grammar, and social strategies for learning grammar. Teachers can apply some strategies to ESP teaching.

Index Terms—ESP, grammar, learning strategies

I. INTRODUCTION

English for specific purposes (ESP) is a branch of applied linguistics and it refers to the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language where the goal of the learners is to use English in a particular domain. A key feature of an ESP course is that the content and aims of the course are oriented to the specific needs of the learners. ESP courses, then, focus on the language, skills, and genres appropriate to the specific activities the learners need to carry out in English (Brian Paltridge & Sue Starfield, 2013, p. 2). One of absolute characteristics of ESP is that ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998, p. 4-5). The study of ESP teaching is in the mature phase, with classroom micro-teaching being the research emphasis. ESP language characteristics, such as technical terms, nominalization, hedges, syntactic complexity, contribute to the ambiguity tolerance and anxiety of ESP learning.

Grammar is concerned with the structure of a language and contributes to producing sentences. The ability to perform the grammar knowledge in the language skills, such as reading, speaking, listening and writing, is necessary in ESP teaching. Therefore, it is necessary that grammar learning should be attached importance to ESP teaching. The goal of grammar learning is not only applied to English for general purposes (EGP), but also to ESP learning. Grammar learning strategies should be emphasized in ESP learning, which is usually paid little attention by ESP teachers and learners. This study is expected to give ESP teachers and learners some useful implications.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF GRAMMAR IN ESP LEARNING

Grammar usually takes into account the meanings and functions sentences have in ESP Learning. However important the components of language may be in themselves, they are connected to each other through grammar (Cook, 2000, p. 14).

It is certain that grammar has important roles in some aspects of ESP learning. Rod Ellis (2005) provides ten general principles for successful instructed learning, among which the first principle is that instruction needs to ensure that learners develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence. In terms of Rod Ellis (2005), proficiency in ESP requires that learners acquire both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions, which caters to fluency in ESP communication, and a rule-based competence consisting of knowledge of specific grammatical rules, which caters to complexity and accuracy in ESP communication.

In general, grammar can basically play two parts in ESP learning: one is to enhance comprehensible input and the other is to monitor effective output. To enhance comprehensible input means that learners use grammar knowledge they have learnt to solve some puzzles in their ESP reading comprehension. When learners cannot understand the meaning of a complicated sentence, they need to analyze the sentence structure, the functions and interrelation of sentence components in order to comprehend the sentence. To monitor effective output means monitoring the oral or written expressions. Many learners have learnt ESP for several years, but they would make some mistakes in the oral or written expressions. It shows that they have not made the best of their mastered grammar knowledge to monitor and adjust the ESP learning output. Therefore, by means of grammar learning, ESP learners' grammar competence is cultivated through learning procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge.

To sum up, in learning ESP, grammar can not only help ESP learners construct more accurate sentences but also help learners use various structures to express thoughts in ESP communication occasions.

III. GRAMMAR AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

Since Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers base their SLA research on cognitive psychology and information-processing approach, they have seen the learner as an active organizer of incoming information and seen SLA as the acquisition of complex, cognitive skill in which the learning of grammar plays an important role and learning strategies (McLaughlin, Rossman, & McLeod, 1983).

The automatized strategic component helps to automatize the grammatical component, and consequently to increase language proficiency. Thus, strategies directly affect language acquisition (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990, p. 196), and consequently grammar acquisition; and on the other hand, the lack of grammatical knowledge may affect the effectiveness of a strategy (Cohen, 1998: 12) and consequently language acquisition (Vicenta, 2002). Cohen's (1998: 123, 221) study shows the connection between grammar and learning strategies by stating that it is likely that the use of strategies contributes to more grammatically accurate speech, and by claiming that determining what grammatical features are needed is one of the steps followed by learners when talking. Learning strategies can facilitate grammatical items to be learnt by helping learners to explicitly notice them, structure them into working and automatize them through practice so that they can be available for spontaneous use (Vicenta, 2002).

Learners pay attention to grammar rules and turn them into declarative knowledge; later it will be thanks to a great deal of practice and feedback that these grammar rules will be restructured and automatized; the grammatical knowledge will be turned into procedural knowledge, and consequently attention will be free to attend to other second language components. Learning strategies are also seen as complex skills whose automatization will help learners to learn grammar. Learning strategies will have to be applied in order to carry out all these steps and consequently, learn grammar and a second language (Vicenta, 2002).

Learning is a cognitive process within learners, and teaching is just a way of facilitating learning; teachers should know how learning takes place in order to help learners to control the central aspects of learning (Brown, 1987, p. 2). Therefore, some recent research on grammar teaching can show implications for grammar learning strategies.

A. *Cognitive Approach to Grammar Learning*

In general, there are two kinds of approaches to learning and teaching grammar. One is deductive learning. It is an approach to language teaching in which learners are taught rules and given specific information about a language. They then apply these rules when they use language; language teaching methods that emphasize the study of the grammatical rules of a language (for example the Grammar Translation Method) make use of the principle of deductive learning (Richards et al, 2000, p. 123).

The other is inductive learning. It is an approach to language teaching in which learners are not taught grammatical or other types of rules directly but are left to discover or induce rules from their experience of using the language; language teaching methods that emphasize the use of the language rather than presentation of information about the language (for example the Direct Method, Communicative Approach, and Counseling Learning) make use of the principle of inductive learning (Richards et al, 2000, p. 123).

The former is explicit teaching of grammar while the latter is implicit. Formed-focused exercises should progress to meaningful activities which should ultimately give ways to tasks where the emphasis is on successful communication.

The role of grammar should arouse our attention; the necessary trend for the development of grammar instruction is the integration of both implicit and explicit grammar instruction. In addition, another kind of approach to learning and teaching grammar is explicit inductive approach suggested by Vicenta (2002) who thinks that grammar explanations are provided to learners for consultation throughout the instructional activities once they have opportunities to discover the rule. Explicit knowledge may contribute to the development of implicit knowledge by helping learners to process input and intake (Ellis, 2005, p. 57).

B. *Communicative Approach to Grammar Learning*

Grauberg (1997, p. 36) emphasizes the importance of grammar learning for being able to communicate by stating that not appreciating the effect of changes in the form or positions of words can distort the meaning of the message since it is the ability to generate utterances through internalized grammatical knowledge which will enable effective communication and interaction to take place (Grauberg, 1997, p. 72).

Grammar and communication influence each other, so they are complimentary. As the result of interlanguage, there may be some errors that may cause miscommunication. However, proficiency and accuracy should be not enemies but allies.

C. *Successful Learners' Grammar Learning*

O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p. 128, 206) discuss the connection between grammar and strategies by enumerating the strategies that successful learners would use to learn grammar such as deduction, induction, translation, and transfer. Thus, they point out that more associating strategy use with learning grammar need to be conducted.

Ellis (1994) pointed out that successful learners (1) attend to language form, (2) also concern meaning or communication, (3) are actively involved in language learning, (4) are aware of the learning process, and (5) are more flexible to use strategies in accordance with task requirements. Most of the researchers agree to these five differences.

To sum up, explicit deduction, implicit induction, consciousness-raising, communication, proficiency and accuracy can be used as English grammar learning strategies. Besides, the traditional grammar-translation method left such an ineradicable memory for many English learners that learning grammar for grammar's sake still occurs in language learning; it is claimed that grammar learning should be linked with context and function because grammar is basically used to enhance comprehensible input and to monitor effective output; only when the link is established between context and text, function and form, can meaningful grammar learning take place. Learners' learning grammatical knowledge may benefit from the effective use of a strategy. Learning strategies may assist students in mastering the forms and functions required for comprehension and production. However, there are very few studies that apply learning strategy research to the learning of grammar.

IV. ESP GRAMMAR LEARNING STRATEGIES CLASSIFICATION

Vicenta (2002) has made a study on grammar learning through the macro-grammar strategy training for secondary school students. The macro-grammar strategy consists of metacognitive and cognitive strategies which students apply when carrying out the designed activities: matching, reading and answering questions, including a rule, filling in the blanks with the right tenses, correcting mistakes, translating, rewriting, and writing. In the metacognitive strategies, selective attention, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation are selected; in the cognitive strategies, elaboration, inference, deduction, repetition, translation, and transfer are selected. Her general conclusion is that students, specially fair and poor learners, following the grammar strategy instruction, can learn grammatical structures better and become a little more autonomous than the students who do not follow the instruction.

In this study, ESP grammar learning strategies (EGLS) refer to all kinds of strategies that make ESP grammar learning more effective, which include not only micro-strategies that learners use to finish learning some specific ESP grammar items to the better degree, but also macro-strategies that learners take to plan, regulate, evaluate, etc. the aims, processes and results of ESP grammar learning, and even learners' knowledge of ESP grammar learning.

ESP grammar learning strategies can be classified into cognitive strategies for learning grammar (CSLG), metacognitive strategies for learning grammar (MSLG), affective strategies for learning grammar (ASLG), and social strategies for learning grammar (SSLG). Every subcategory is embodied with the relevant specific items.

CSLG are those strategies learners use to be more efficient to identify, understand, retain and extract grammar knowledge, with details in Table1.

TABLE 1
CSLG SPECIFIC ITEMS

Items	Description	
CSLG	Preparation	Being ready beforehand for learning grammar
	Attention to form	Focusing consciousness on specific aspects of grammar knowledge
	Thinking	Reasoning about or reflecting on grammar
	Key word	Remembering grammar by generating easily recalled images of some relationship with the new grammar knowledge
	Understanding	Organizing grammar materials in long-term memory, restructuring and grasping the meaning of them
	Induction and deduction	Generalizing grammar rules and consciously using rules to produce or understand English
	Correction	Correcting grammatical errors and learn from errors
	Translation	Using the mother tongue as a base for understanding or producing grammar rules
	Imagery	Relating new information to visual concepts in memory via familiar easily retrievable visualization
	Resourcing	Expanding grammar knowledge through use of grammar reference materials
	Repetition	Imitating or reciting grammar smartly including overt practice and silent rehearsal
	Transfer	Using previously acquired grammar knowledge to facilitate a new language learning task
	Inference	Inferring and analyzing grammar rules from a text
	Elaboration	Integrating new information to existing grammar knowledge
	Contextualization	Placing grammar rules in a meaningful language sequence
Note-taking	Writing down the main ideas, important points, outline, or summary	

MSLG help learners to confirm and regulate the learning aims, select learning approaches and techniques, and evaluate and feedback the learning results, with details in Table2.

TABLE 2
MSLG SPECIFIC ITEMS

Items	Description	
MSLG	Directed attention	Giving decision in advance to a learning task and ignoring irrelevant distracters
	Advance preparation	Making plans for grammatical knowledge for the language task
	Self-regulating	Knowing about the conditions that help learn language knowledge
	Self-evaluating	Checking the outcomes of learning grammar or examining the results of productions and deciding which elements can be improved.

ASLG are those strategies learners use to foster, adjust and control emotions in the process of learning grammar, with details in Table3.

TABLE3
ASLG SPECIFIC ITEMS

Items	Description	
ASLG	Cultivating interest	Having or showing curiosity, fascination, or concern on grammar learning
	Positive attitude	Having an active state of mind or a feeling in grammar learning
	Confidence	Having a feeling of assurance in grammar learning
	Lowering anxiety	Weakening the state of uneasiness and apprehension in grammar learning
	Encouraging others	Inspiring other learners with hope, courage, or confidence in grammar learning
	Care of others' emotions	Concerning other learners' feelings in grammar learning
	Regulating own emotions	Self-controlling own feelings in grammar learning
Being helpful	Providing assistance for other learners in grammar learning	

SSLG are those strategies learners use to apply the gained grammar knowledge to intercommunication, with details in Table4.

TABLE4
SSLG SPECIFIC ITEMS

Items	Description	
SSLG	Communication	Applying learnt rules to language expressions for the exchange of thoughts, messages, or information
	Clarification	Asking teachers or other learners for the explanation of language knowledge
	Cooperation	Exchanging feedback or information in a language activities
	Fluency	Tending to express oneself readily and effortlessly with little attention to grammatical regulation
	Accuracy	Monitoring expressions for grammatical regulation

V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR ESP

First of all, teachers should be aware and emphasize that they could provide strategies-based instruction of grammar to ESP learners and find what kinds of strategies are useful and effective for ESP learners to learn grammar. Thus, as facilitators of learning, teachers can help ESP learners select and become proficient in the use of effective grammar learning strategies, and as Jones et al. (1987, p. 56) have indicated, teachers try to change ESP learners' attitudes about their own abilities by teaching them that their failures can be attributed to the lack of effective strategies rather than to the lack of ability or to laziness. Therefore, ESP grammar learning strategy training can not only be beneficial to reaching the final goal of grammar learning, which is to cultivate grammar competence through learning grammar knowledge or procedural knowledge through learning declarative knowledge, but also to develop ESP learners' learning ability that is vital for ESP learners' learning at school and even lifelong learning.

Secondly, cognitive approaches are suggested applying to teaching ESP grammar. One is the deductive approach or explicitly teaching grammar; teachers should teach ESP learners rules and give them specific information about ESP, then have them then apply these rules when they use ESP. The other is the inductive approach or implicitly teaching grammar; teachers leave ESP learners discovering grammatical rules from their experience of using ESP.

Thirdly, fluency and accuracy are allies not enemies, and grammar and communication are complimentary since they shape and influence each other, and internalized grammatical knowledge will enable effective communication and interaction to take place. Hence, communicative approach can be used to teach English grammar; teachers help ESP learners to notice and structure by focusing on specific forms and meanings, and guide ESP learners' own attention to grammar and design grammar learning tasks that help to teach them skills of ESP, such as reading, speaking, listening or writing, in order for them to utilize grammar for their own communication.

In addition, it is true that an overuse of the mother language can be a drawback, and students may miss chances of using ESP, so the mother language is only used in the ESP classroom when needed, since the mother language is an essential factor to turn input into intake and it helps learners to differentiate important structural differences between the mother tongue and ESP.

Finally, teachers guide ESP learners to have proper and positive attitudes towards learning grammar, and instruct them to learn ESP grammar not only autonomously, but also cooperatively with the aim that learning grammar is better to facilitate their skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and accordingly, helps to improve ESP proficiency on the whole.

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