



**The Role of Task- Based Techniques on The
Acquisition of English Language Structures
By The Intermediat EFL Students**

By:

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Dedicated To My Beloved Parents

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Role of Task - Based Techniques On The Acquisition of English Language Structures By The Intermediate EFL Students

From an historical perspective, teaching grammar has been central to and often synonymous with teaching foreign language for the past 2,500 years. The position of grammar in foreign language teaching has always been controversial in the sense that how it should be taught , or even whether to teach it at all. But the fact is that grammar permeates all language skills and the main objective of teaching grammar is the oral use of the target language for communicative puposes (Paulston 1976, p.1).

Therefore , what takes a special importance is the fact that grammar principles should be integrated into a communicative framework, since the fundamental purpose of language, as mentioned before, is communication. Unfortunately, grammar is often taught in isolated , unconnected sentences that give an unrealistic picture of English and make it difficult for students to apply what they learned in actual situations (Celce - Murcia and Hilles 1988, p.8).

Looking at the history of the second and / or foreign language teaching one can see that the students begin taught through structure-oriented methods and techniques may have a great amount of knowledge about the language usage, but they are not able to put this knowledge into practice appropriately. To solve this problem, the communicative apprauch was developed by the scholars and hence more task - based activities were invented.

(This study examines the effetivenss of task - based activities in helping students

learn English language structures for a better communication.) It is also designed to answer the question which technique to teaching English language structures is more effective: the structural or the task - based techniques.

Regarding the purpose of the study, the following null hypotheses are formulated:

Ho1: There is no significant difference between structurally based and task - based techniques in teaching English language structures to the intermediate EFL students.

Ho2: There is no significant effect on the intermediate EFL students learning English language structures through structural - based techniques.

Ho3: The task - based techniques have no significant effect on the intermediate EFL students knowledge of the English language structures.

Initially, a Michigan test was administered to the two groups of 52 students majoring in English at the Allameh Ghotb - e - Ravandi university to ensure their homogeneity. The students scores on the grammar part of this test were also regarded as their pretest scores.

Having ensured the homogeneity of the two groups, the two different teaching techniques were applied to the subjects. The students in the control group were instructed through structural techniques and the subjects in the experimental group through task - based ones. After 10 sessions of instruction , the same Michigan test was administered to the two groups. Their scores on the grammar part were considered as their posttest scores. Regarding H0 1, the performance of the two groups on the posttest were compared and analyzed applying the t - test formula.

The t - observed exceeded the t - critical value at both 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance ($3.10 > 2.02$, $3.10 > 2.7$). Therefore, the first null hypothesis is refuted.

In case of Ho2: The performance of the control group on their pretest and posttest were analyzed using t - test formula. The results showed that the t - observed was less than the t - critical value at both levels of significance ($1.16 < 2.02$, $1.16 < 2.70$). Thus the second null hypothesis is maintained.

Considering Ho3, the performance of the experimental group on their pretest and posttest were analyzed. In this case, the t-observed exceeded the t-critical value again at both 0.05 and 0.01 levels of significance ($4.39 > 2.02$, $4.39 > 2.70$). Hence, the third null hypothesis is rejected, too.

Taking above discussions into consideration, it can be concluded that the intermediate EFL students learn English language structures better when they are taught through task-based techniques than through structural techniques. Therefore, language teachers are invited to furnish their teaching with the task - based techniques and activities, if they wish to educate more proficient language learners. (Implications of this study for teaching and for further research are also discussed in chapter V).

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1.A Brief Overview

From an historical perspective , teaching grammar and language structures has been central to and often synonymous with teaching foreign language for the past 2,500 years. However, the position of grammar in foreign language teaching has always been controversial in the sense that how it should be taught or even whether to teach it at all. But, the fact is that grammar permeates all skills and the main objective of teaching grammar is the oral use of the target language for communicative purposes (Paulston 1979, p.1). Therefore, what takes a special importance is the fact that grammar principles should be integrated into a communicative framework, since the fundamental purpose of language , as mentioned before, is communication. Unfortunately, grammar is often taught in isolated, unconnected sentences that give an unrealistic picture of English and make it difficult for students to apply what they have learned in actual situations (Celce - Murcia and Hilles 1988, p.8).

Now, looking at the history of the second and/or foreign language teaching, one can see that there has been a great shift of emphasis in this field from the structurally - based methods and techniques of language teaching to the more recent task - oriented ones. In the former, the emphasis has been put on the grammatical and lexical units of language, paying little or no attention to what could be done

with such units. Now that the hayday of structuralism has come to an end and the communicative approach has broadened the horizons of SLT/ FLT, the attention is on the more task - based activities whose primary purpose surpasses the mere production of correct speech and actually focuses on the ability to communicate the intended meaning.

All these changes in the instructional methods and materials have been made to satisfy the learners' needs. New types of approaches have emerged to facilitate the teaching / learning process. But there are still questions on whether or not they have reached their objectives.

Unfortunately, there are still many foreign language teaching programmes that follow the audiolingual approach and base their teaching techniques on the structurally - oriented activities. Therefore, to develop a more comprehensive language teaching programme, every effort should be made first to examine the effectiveness of task - based techniques and second to introduce them-if proved successful-to those involved in the field of foreign language teaching and learning.

1.2.Statement of The Problem

What has so far been observed is that the students being taught through structure - oriented method and techniques may have a great amount of knowledge about the language usage, but are not good communicators. That is to say , they are not able to put their linguistic knowledge in to practice appropriately.

To solve this problem, the communicative approach was developed by the scholars and hence the more task - based activities were invented. Larsen and

Freeman (1986) in this regard state:

" ... Since communication is a process it is insufficient for students to simply have knowledge of target language forms, meanings, and functions. Students must be able to apply this knowledge in negotiating meaning."(Larsen and Freeman,p.123)

This study examines the effectiveness of task - based activities in helping students learn English language structures for a better communication. Therefore, the main research questions would be:

- 1) Which one of these two techniques is more effective than the other for teaching English language structures to the intermediate EFL students: the structural technique or the task - based technique?
- 2) Will structural techniques for teaching English language structures have any significant effect on the intermediate EFL students?
- 3) What will be the effect of task - oriented techniques of teaching English language structures on the intermediate EFL students?

1.3. The Null Hypotheses

Taking abovementioned research questions into consideration, the following null hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between structurally - based and task - based techniques in teaching English language structures to the intermediate EFL Students.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant effect on the intermediate EFL students Learning English language Structures through structurally - based techniques.

Hypothesis 3: The task - based techniques have no significant effect on the intermediate EFL students' knowledge of the English language structures.

1.4. The Significance of The Study

With the advent of modern approaches to language teaching and learning like communicative approach, the attention of those involved in this field has been turned from purely grammatical and structural features of language towards more communicative ones, developing new types of techniques for teaching foreign languages.

However, there are still many text books used at highschool and college levels which are written on the basis of structural approaches (e.g.Modern English Parts I and 2, let's write , communicate what you mean etc).Also , there are still many language teachers who stick to the audiolingual. method and techniques of teaching, reluctant to try out the new ways in which language can be taught.

This study gives language teachers and learners an opportunity to begin thinking about the new ways of teaching and learning a foreign language in an attempt to persuade them to examine modern methods and techniques.

In addition, the findings of this research will be benefical to syllabus designers and textbook writers in putting their selection, sequencing, and grading on a more useful and practical basis.

By involving students in various types of activities, such as problem- solving