CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, I will review literature on the two issues that drive this action research, the teaching of grammar and the characteristics of action research.

Grammar

"Grammar" is a central term in linguistics, but one which covers a wide range of phenomena. The term "grammar" referred to in this study is that which concurs with Stevick's (1982). In his book, *Teaching and Learning Languages* he says:

> "Grammar", ... is a way of telling, as accurately and clearly as possible, just how a particular language arranges its smaller forms - its word stems, prefixes, suffixes, intonations and the like - within its larger constructions such as words, clauses and sentences. A grammatical statement also gives information about the meanings of the constructions which it describes". (p. 187)

Stevick's (1982) idea of discourse seems to be primarily at a sentence or intrasentence level but in this action research, I would like to combine his view with that of Keh (1991) who adopted the view that it should be expanded to include the paragraph, interparagraph and essay level.

Grammar in Major Methodological Approaches to Language Teaching

For more than two centuries the teaching of grammar had been the content for language teaching and the organising principle for curriculum or materials development. In fact, as Rutherford(1987) pointed out, it had often been synonymous with foreign language teaching. Its importance was not diminished with the rise of the Audiolingual approach of the forties and fifties (eg Fries, 1945) or the Cognitive Code Approach of the mid-sixties and early-seventies (eg Jakobits, 1970).

Both these approaches were still preoccupied with sentence level grammatical structure. In pedagogical applications of both approaches, the structural syllabus was the only known way of organizing a language course and the purpose of second or foreign language instruction was to enable the learner to be able to use the forms of the target language accurately.

The consequent popularity of the Comprehension Approach and the Communicative Approach in the seventies and the eighties however erroded the centrality of grammar teaching. In the former approach, grammar was presented inductively; a more radical view of the approach in fact excluded all grammar instruction from the classroom since they feel it does not facilitate language acquisition; at best it merely helps learners to monitor or become aware of the forms they use (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

Proponents of the Communicative Approach however are divided with regard to the nature, extent and type of grammar instruction or grammar awareness activities appropriate for second language or foreign language

(Marianne Celce-Murcia, 1991).

Now however there is both anecdotal and empirical evidence from second language acquisition research and classsroom research (Celce-Murcia, 1991 cites Higgs & Clifford, 1982; Long, 1980) indicating that adolescent and adult learners do not master the grammar of a second language merely through using or understanding the language.

Need For Explicit Grammar Knowledge

Ellis (1991) suggested that developing the explicit knowledge of grammatical features of learners is helpful. It can contribute to L2 acquisition in two major ways.

Firstly, by knowing about a grammatical feature, learners are more likely to notice that feature in input and therefore acquire it as implicit knowledge. However, he conceded that whether learners can integrate the L2 feature into their interlanguage systems, turning it into implicit knowledge, is subject to developmental constrains.

Secondly, explicit knowledge can be used to construct planned utterances, which then serve as input for the language processing mechanism. However there are restrictions on how much explicit knowledge the typical learner can learn. Furthermore, explicit knowledge plays only a "monitoring role" in communicative language use.

Despite these limitations studies have shown that developing the explicit

knowledge of grammatical features of learners can accelerate the process of acquiring implicit knowledge and may even be necessary for the acquisition of certain kinds of grammar rules which cannot be acquired solely by means of input derived from communicative language use (Fotos, S. & Ellis, R. 1991 cites Hammerly, 1987).

In view of this, Ellis (1991) suggests that formal instruction should be directed at ensuring that learners know about a target structure and can monitor with it (i.e., consciously correct their own erroneous output) but not at enabling them to use the structure in free communication.

He went on to suggest the use of the kind of grammar teaching that aims at consciousness-raising rather than practice. Such tasks, he added, provide serious content in contrast to the trivial content of many information-gap activities, and they accommodate learners who believe that it is important to learn about grammar.

Revealing

One such pedagogical activities which can help learners to be conscious of the grammatical features to be processed is termed "revealing" by Cazden (1993). Cazden (1993) used the term "revealing" in her plenary address to the Second International Conference on Teacher Education in Second Language Teaching in March 1993 in Hong Kong.

She defines it as the kind of pedagogical activity the teacher engages in

which lies somewhat in the centre of the continuum of implicit(eg immersion) and explicit(or telling) teaching. It is not synonymous with "enquiry" and "discovery" which refer to the mental activity of learners. It is clear from the three examples she gave that any pedagogical activity used by the teacher which lead students towards guided enquiry can be called revealing. Revealing is useful as it can contribute to the resocialization of attention for instance to focus attention on the significant features the teacher wants to bring to their attention or those the learners seem to be ignoring.

This centre position is advocated in the wake of the realization that while both immersion and telling are useful pedagogical tools, both have serious limitations.

Henry Widdowson in his book *Aspects of Language Teaching* (1990), pointed out that immersion in even the richest and most authentic communicative activities is not sufficient for many L2 learners. Cazden (1993) concluded that immersion is necessary but not sufficient.

Telling which refers to teacher-led activities in which some metalanguage is used for explicit discussion of language itself has several shortcoming. To quote Cazden (1993):

> ...information learning from telling seems often to be indigestable for later use ... there is little evidence that writers can use grammar lessons about parts of speech and the components of complete sentences to improve their texts. Secondly, attempts to tell some general statements about the way language works risk oversimplifying complex reality ... the seeming security of being told a "rule" may make it less likely that the learner will independently pay attention to variations in pattern as they are encountered.

Cazden (1993) however recognizes that there is a place for both implicit

and explicit teaching. In fact she suggests that "we need to teach along the whole continuum, with teachers as well as with their students".

Relevance of Focus on Form

At this point, I would like to make clear that I strongly believe there is more to discovering grammar features in the learning of the English Language. However, there are times, when it is appropriate to emphasize grammatical accuracy.

Celce-Murcia (1991) has identified 2 main variables, learner variables and instructional variables which the teacher must take into consideration when deciding to what degree they ought to deal with grammar in their classes.

Under Learner Variables, the teacher will have to consider:

1. Age

    Young children being by necessity more holistic in their approach to learning than adults need little explicit grammar instruction whereas students who are adolescents or adults may well be facilitated in their learning by some explicit focus on form.

2. Proficiency Level

    Celce-Murcia (1991) also posited that there is little justification in focusing on form, beyond presenting and practising the obvious form-meaning correspondences in context for ESL(English as a Second Language) learners

who are beginners(regardless of age).

Beginners who have just begun to learn something completely new and different tend to initially approach the new "object" holistically for a time before feeling ready to do any meaningful analysis. However learners who are at the intermediate or advanced level will need form-related feedback and correction from the teacher in order to progress.

3. Educational Background

Literate and well-educated learners will become frustrated and annoyed if the teacher does not provide adequate opportunity for them to focus on the formal aspects of the target language. However, it would not be very productive to focus extensively on form for students who are preliterate or semiliterate adults with little formal education. However, even these people may expect some grammar because of cultural expectations.

The need to focus on form should also vary according to the educational objectives the ESL teacher must address. The Instructional Variables the teacher will have to take into consideration are:

1. Skill

It would be more relevant to emphasize grammar if one is focusing on productive skills especially writing since formal accuracy is an important concern here. It would be less important to emphasize form when teaching receptive skills such as listening and reading.

2. Register

A teacher who is offering a conversation class would not need to place too much emphasis on accuracy of form unlike a class that is dealing with expository writing.

3. Need

This address the question of what the learner needs to be able to do in the target language. Formal accuracy is of marginal value if the learner's immediate goal is survival communication but if the learner wants to function as an academic or for other professional needs, formal accuracy is essential.

Celce-Murcia (1991) has put these variables into a grid as a visual aid to help teachers decide the degree to which it is appropriate for them to focus on form with a given group of students.

According to Celce-Murcia (1991), the more factors the teacher identifies on the left side of the grid, the less important it is to focus on form; the more factors the teacher identifies on the right, the more important the grammatical focus.

FIGURE 1

Variables that Determine the Importance of Grammar

	Less Important --- Focus on Form --- More Important		
Learner Variables			
Age	Children	Adolescents	Adults
Proficiency level	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced
Educational background	Preliterate, no formal education	Semiliterate, some formal education	Literate well educated
Instructional Variables			
Skill	Listening, reading	Speaking	Writing
Register	Informal	Consultative	Formal
Need/Use	Survival	Vocational	Professional

When I placed the learner variables and the instructional variables of this action research against this grid, I found it was appropriate and necessary for me to focus on the simple be-passive form which my students had not mastered in order for them to be able to write a comprehensible description of a process.

The Be-Passive

In this action research, I will be focusing on the simple be-passive. This form of the passive is the one most often used in describing a process and as such

would be useful for the students to master.

There are other variations of the passive voice, such as the "get" passive, complex passives with "have", which incidentally they will have to learn to use in Form 4 and stative passives but I will limit this study's focus to only the simple present and past be-passive.

In this sub-section I will describe how the structure is formed, when it is used and whether there are any particular rules or exceptions governing its use.

Form of Structure

The simple be-passive is formed by putting the present or past form of "be" with the past participle of a verb:

present/past "be" + past participle

examples: The butter <u>is kept</u> here.

The window <u>was broken</u>.

When it is Used

Frank (1972) listed 2 situations when the be-passive would be chosen over the active voice:

1. when attention is being drawn to the "receiver" rather than the "doer" of the action (e.g., My dog was hit by a car).

2. when the "doer" of the action is unimportant or not known.

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 19 (1983:225) added that besides these two situations provided by Frank, the "be" passive is also used:

3. when the agent is obvious and therefore, not expressed

   (e.g., Grapes are grown in the Napa Valley)

4. when the writer wants to sound objective.

   (e.g., It is assumed/believed thatthis was among the most significant policy

   decisions of the decade.)

5. when the writer wishes to retain the same grammatical subject in successive

   clauses.

   (e.g., Rene Arredondo beat Lonnie Smith, but he was beaten by Gato

   Garcia.)

6. when the theme is shared information, but the agent is new.

   (e.g., What a beautiful picture! Isn't it? It was painted by one of my

   students.)

Rules Governing its Use

Celce-Murcia and Larsen Freeman (1983) also noted that most passive do

not have an agent. They cited a usage study conducted by Shintani (1979) which

suggests that since 85% of all passives will not retain an agent, teachers should

therefore teach their students when and why to retain an agent in a passive, rather

than teach when to omit an agent. Shintani's study includes a list of those

situations in which a "by" phrase is retained:

1. when the agent is a proper name designating an artist, inventor, discoverer,

   innovator, etc., who is too important to omit in the context (e.g., The Mona

   Lisa was painted by da Vinci.)

2. when the agent is an indefinite noun phrase (i.e., new information) and is retained to provide the listener or reader with the new information (i.e., While Jill was walking down the street, her purse was snatched by a young man.)

3. when the agent is an inanimate noun phrase which is retained because it is unexpected...(we usually expect an agent to be animate, e.g., All the lights and appliances in the Albertson household are switched on and off daily by an electrical device.)

Action Research

Although Action Research is not new, it is only in recent years that there has been renewed interest and a greater amount of such research. There are varying understanding of the term Action Research but basically it refers to teachers doing research on their own teaching and the learning of their students.

The characteristics of the Action Research adopted for this study are those outlined by Crookes (1993) in his article "Action Research for Second Language Teachers: Going Beyond Teacher Research".

Action Research, Crookes (1993) posited should start with the immediate needs of a teacher and as such the research questions should emerge from the teacher's own immediate concern and problem. Its objective is to arrive at locally-valid understandings of problems in teaching and learning. Therefore its findings are not necessarily of maximal generality.

Consequently, large databases, techniques for their reduction and analysis, and steps which allow the replicability of results across many different environments are less needed. On the other hand, techniques which capitalize on the researcher's deep familiarity with the situation are appropriate.

Throughout the research, reflection and enquiry must continually be developed in as objective a manner as possible. When a cycle of investigation is concluded, the results must be communicated in such a way that they can immediately be comprehended and utilized by other teachers.

The style of writing an Action Research report is also different from the way academic reports are usually written. The use of the pronoun "I" rather than the usually more detached "this researcher" is acceptable. Crookes (1993) cites Winter (1968) as having stated in his book, *Learning from Experience : Principles and Practice in Action Research,* that:

> since our writing emerges from a different set of relationships(collaborative and action-oriented, rather than authoritative and observant-oriented) the format of our writing would also be different...certain stylistic features of "academic" writing could also be seen as inappropriate for action-research reports. i.e. those ...which seem to express the expert role by suggesting a withdrawal from personal involvement, and a sustained abstraction from concrete detail.