

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

'It would be pointless teaching students if teachers too find difficulties with the language' (Tan Sri Haji Rahman Arshad).

5.0 Introduction

This study has shown that students, if exposed to relevant literature, will not only improve their language, but will engage in it. Once they get emotionally involved in reading, the teaching of English becomes a much simpler task. If learning a language is to attain proficiency in it, reading extensively will provide just that.

5.1 Limitations of the study

This study looks at what happens when learners, for whom English is a second language are exposed to extensive reading. It would have yielded more interesting results, if there was more time to study the progress over a long period of time, at least a year.

If more students were involved in the study, the results could have been more reliable and valid. If a few Malay and Indian students were also included, the analysis would have shown consistency in their errors if there were any. These were not readily available at the place where this study was conducted.

A more thorough study could have been undertaken, if there was more time, and other facilities, like sufficient and suitable reading materials, a proper place to conduct the project and a time-table approved by the college authorities.

5.2 Significance of the study

The results of this study has implications for syllabus design, materials development, testing and evaluation, and even teacher training - (a paradigm shift in the teaching and learning of English). Syllabus designers can focus on stories that interest young readers. There is already a move in this direction; form 1 students from this year, 2000 are to study English and Malay literature. Today schools have graded readers and these texts can be used to teach grammar in context. The learners can be taught why a certain tense is used in a particular situation instead of another for reasons of meaning and what had happened before or is going to happen later. The story line with appropriate discourse markers will indicate the right part of speech. Stories with moral values and cultural input can improve the readers character and personality.

Material developers can now think of interesting small" I " literature, normally stories written by Malaysian, Singaporean and other Asean writers. In Malaysia, cross-cultural literature can foster racial understanding. Our young readers can get to know the people of Asia by reading these stories. Testing should be based on what the learners have read. Grammar can be taught and tested within the

context provided in the text. In this way, the teaching of grammar will become meaningful as there is a lot of language input.

There is scope for teacher training too. The teacher can aspire to become a good story teller. From the stories he/she can pick out present, past and future events and show how the language functions in authentic situations, and not teach tenses with sentential examples as is the practice most times.

The stories can be exploited to teach the four skills and grammar(mentioned earlier). Students can form groups and each student can read a story, after which he narrates the story he has read to his group. While he narrates, his group listens and writes down what they have heard. In this way , all the students read, narrate, listen and write. The four skills are employed using a story. Peer checking for accuracy and detail can form an exciting activity as it interests them. The affective filter (cited earlier) will be lowered and the learners progress with little or no inhibition. And if a teacher can share jokes, language jokes, and if learners can enjoy and learn vocabulary and sentence structure from these jokes, the task of teaching becomes easier and enjoyable.

5.3 Scope For Further Study

The students could have been tested every three months to find out the areas they have made some progress in (i.e. the tenses – the past, the present and the future) and those tenses that still pose a problem. Individual learners too could be studied closely to chart out the good language learners' progress from those who are not so good. These results could then be matched with the

findings of other researchers who have conducted similar studies. The tense items which the good learners acquired competence in, and the slow learners were unable to master should be carefully and systematically analyzed. This information could serve as data for language acquisition research.

Two groups, one which is immersed in extensive reading, and the other, which is taught grammar only should have been the subject of the study. The performance of these groups could be studied. Preferably, the groups should be residential students with the researcher being an ethnographer to make the study and the result more valid and reliable.

An interesting area for further study would be the preposition. English has undergone a lot of changes, namely the gradual loss of inflections and the role of auxiliaries, modals in the tense system, and the preposition. The preposition is hard to teach as they are normally not rule-governed. We say 'on the table', but in other places, we find 'on the bus, 'on the train', alongside 'in the car'. We are unable to provide logical explanations for such use; so we resort to some answer which is not linguistically appropriate. We say 'in the morning', 'in the afternoon', but 'at night' – why? is there any grammatical explanation for this? The early learner, that is the beginner is confused, because the preposition is inconsistent in its grammatical behaviour; and the teacher is embarrassed, because he is unable to provide a good explanation.

The best way, is to expose the learner to a lot of literature, good, simple, readable, small 'I' literature. A study on the acquisition of prepositions after exposure to extensive reading/ listening will be interesting.

5.4 Conclusion

Language classrooms, can be turned into places where there is entertainment and joy; the sharing of jokes and stories. This will lead to a paradigm shift in our approach to teaching and learning a language. Grammar should be taught alongside small 'l' literature and not in isolation. The type of pedagogic grammar appropriate to learner needs, now in fashion is communicative grammar (grammar in context). When a text or discourse is used to teach grammar, it will show relationship. Grammar is in fact, a relationship between lexis, clauses or chunks of discourse. This, I would call, a grammar of relationship, perhaps a slightly new approach to pedagogic grammar. Grammar, no doubt is essential, but the question is , what grammar, is to be taught? How much is to be taught? In what sequence is it to be taught? How and when should it be taught? These are some of the issues to be addressed. Grammarians have and are still cracking their heads in a bid to find the right answers. As a result of this study, I can foresee classrooms becoming lively with interesting stories to share and enjoy. If the classrooms become a place of joy, learning takes place faster because the affective filter is lowered. Language learning outside the classroom can be organised by having reading clubs. The teacher in the class can provide stories of varying standards to suit the language proficiency of the learners. This means that even a poor student will have a simple story to read, unlike in the present classroom where all have to read the same text.

The language syllabus can be changed to include a lot of reading and listening materials. At a later stage, when funds are available, children can have TV programmes that have tales from literature and these can be discussed in class. The testing format can be changed to ask questions and opinions of what they had read in the class. The teacher's job becomes less dull and tedious but more responsible and fun-filled. He/she can be a real guide/ supervisor who assists the students. There is no need to indulge in boring activities that kill the students early in their school life. Grammar items cannot be learnt easily if one is not exposed to its language (its natural environment.). Grammar is embedded in the language. One cannot have language without grammar, and grammar without language.

No matter how hard we try to introduce changes, the diehards will prevail as they have always done so. We have our notions of what constitutes good grammar and how it should be learnt and taught. These notions and philosophies are a result of 'grammarism', a term I have coined to express such ideas as I have stated above.. (viz: notions of correctness, methods and approaches to language learning and teaching; in short linguistic idiosyncrasies) Like all 'isms' , this too has all kinds of people with all kinds of notions. As the confusion (ie., a debate on what is right and wrong) prevails, it is the language learner who suffers. He is subjected to all sorts of experiments.

Let us leave him alone. He has the ability to learn on his own. Let him do that, and he will take care of the grammar, he wants to know and use.