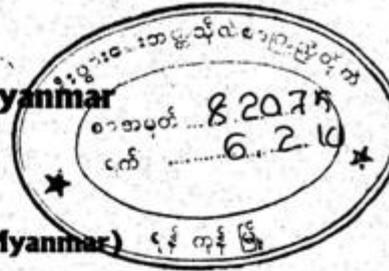


The Government of the Union of Myanmar
Ministry of Education



Department of Higher Education (Lower Myanmar)
and
Department of Higher Education (Upper Myanmar)

Universities

Research Journal

Vol. 2, No. 6

December, 2009.

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A Communicative Approach to Teaching Types of Sentences: Simple, Compound, Complex and Multiple Sentences

Khin Myo Su

Abstract

A communicative approach to teaching grammar corresponds to real life situation. In the EFL curricula, all four skills are conducted stressing the importance of grammar. However, the main difficulty with many EFL learners is that though they recognize most of the rules of grammar, they are not aware of how to put them into use in real life. Therefore, to make EFL learners familiarize themselves with all possible grammar points and use them accurately, correctly and efficiently, it is necessary to explore an actual effective teaching method in the specific area of grammar - types of sentences: simple, compound, complex and multiple sentences.

Key words: communicative approach, rules of grammar, real life situation, types of sentences

Introduction

It is accepted that Myanmar English language learners have learned rules of English grammar and made sentences based on those rules since they were young. However, they do not master how to write the sentences of English language correctly, semantically and appropriately. They have been taught just the rules of grammar and given unrelated separate sentences to do as grammar exercises regardless of the context. Consequently, effective use of grammar is lacking in an EFL context. Successful and efficient use of grammar depends not only on their knowledge of rules of grammar but also on their ability to use grammar, that is, the ability of making English sentences in authentic situation.

This paper first deals with the 'statement of the research problem', 'the rationale and the objectives of the study', 'research questions and research design' and then 'a review of relevant literature' will follow them. Then, the 'methodology' used in the research and how the data was collected and analysed are presented. The problems that EFL learners face while making sentence is discussed in the next section and it is followed by features of types of English sentences. The last section deals with the results

and discussion which is followed by pedagogic implications and suggestions for teaching grammar: types of sentences – simple, compound, complex and multiple sentences in EFL situations.

Statement of Problem and Rationale

In Myanmar, almost all the lessons in the prescribed textbook used at the tertiary level are conducted stressing the importance of grammar. However, most students at the university level are still weak in making correct and accurate sentences: simple, compound and complex sentences in their pieces of writing. It is because they have received just the rules of grammar without getting a chance of being exposed to the context in which they can apply them throughout their school life. Students should be encouraged to use their new knowledge of grammar rules to make their sentences at an early stage (Harmer, 1983). In fact, effective and efficient use of grammar facilitates all four skills of English and thus leads to effective and successful communication among the users.

Even though Myanmar EFL learners have been taught a lot of grammar throughout their school life, they encounter many difficulties in making sentences when they produce a piece of writing. Also, they are unable to realize the mistakes they have made. One of the reasons is that though some of them have some knowledge of grammatical rules, they do not have enough practice in using them in real context and some of them have never had the experiences of using them in their own writing. Therefore, where the difficulties lie in constructing sentences should be investigated and ways to help them to become effective users of particular area of grammar, that is, effective users of types of sentences: simple, compound and complex sentences need to be explored urgently. This study hypothesizes that 'if learners are exposed to forms of particular structures: simple, compound, complex and multiple sentences and are trained how to apply those rules of grammar in real situations, it is expected that the learners will be able to cope with that particular area of grammar efficiently and accurately.

Scope and Objectives of the Study

The research area is mainly focused on 'types of sentences: simple, compound, complex and multiple sentences.' The purposes of the study are: firstly to identify problems in writing sentences that most Myanmar learners come across; secondly to examine the nature of forms of English

structures or sentences by designing lessons that are to be taught communicatively so that they can recognize the rules when using the language and finally to do pilot teaching to students to find out whether the programme is successful in conducting a communicative approach to teaching types of English sentences. The researcher assumes that the findings of the present research will directly contribute to Myanmar learners to solve the problem of learning how to write various types of sentences. Furthermore, it will give teachers who are trying to explore more effective teaching methodology valuable insights into their communicative teaching of grammar.

Research Questions and Research Design

The research questions are:

1. Can students easily identify various types of sentences?
2. Do they have the same difficulties in changing simple to compound and vice versa, simple to complex and vice versa and compound to complex and vice versa?
3. To what extent can students generate various types of sentences using phrases or clauses?
4. Is the communicative teaching method of grammar a really effective method?

The study can be categorized as a design of giving *pre-test*, *pilot teaching* and *post-test* and recording the students' scores of both of the tests and comparing them. Each test includes Test A, Test B and Test C covering up different kinds of grammar exercises. Test A deals with identifying whether each sentence in a given paragraph is a 'simple' or 'compound' or 'complex', etc sentence, Test B concerns with '*sentence completion*' using 'phrases' or 'clauses' and Test C covers '*changing one type of sentence into another*', that is, simple to compound or complex or vice-versa.

Literature Review

'No one seriously interested in the development of second and foreign language has ever suggested that learners do not need to master the grammatical system of the target language.'(Nunan 1991:152) In fact learning grammar helps learners improve mastery of the language.

According to Noam Chomsky (1978), a native speaker has a set of grammar rules in his brain and he can use it to create an infinite number of sentences. It implies that the rule does not change while the sentence does and we can select the vocabulary to mean what we want by using the rules. Apparently, we can assume that grammar is not just a question of competence. It is also a question

of performance, that is, the ability of a person to effectively use his internalized knowledge to get a desired communicative impact. (Harmer 1983:12) Therefore, '.... grammar exists to enable us to 'mean', and without grammar it is impossible to communicate beyond a very rudimentary level.'(Nunan 1991:153) Clearly, no speaking and writing are possible without the knowledge of grammar, without the forming of a grammar mechanism.

Nowadays, much attention is paid to teaching grammar at schools in most of the countries in Asia, for example, Singapore. Teaching trends of grammar have also been changed from traditional method of teaching to where grammar is taught communicatively in which grammar exercises are to be done in the form of activity in real life situation after learning the the rules of grammar unconsciously. Later, rules may be presented so as to make learners remember the rules.

The review of literature shows that selecting grammar materials for teaching types of sentences and designing grammar exercises or activities depend on the principles of a particular approach that is adopted. Nowadays, teaching grammar is getting popular together with the communicative approach which mainly contributes to this study. The grammar exercises given by Pollock(1982), Azar(1993) and Emery, Kierzek, Lindblom(1991) all are in favour of the present study as they highlighted a need to redesign grammar lessons to be taught in the classroom, focusing on the creativity based on real life situation.

Regarding a communicative approach to teaching 'types of sentences: simple, compound and complex sentences', no one has done a research on such area of grammar in Myanmar. Therefore, it is necessary for English language teachers and learners to do a good and empirical research on this area of grammar in Myanmar.

Methodology

Some features of a communicative approach to teaching types of sentences: simple, compound, complex and multiple sentences are as follows:

1. Context and Elicitation

In the communicative grammar teaching, '*context*' and '*elicitation*' are placed in the first stage where there is the pyramidal approach to teaching types of sentences. At this stage, a certain type of sentences is introduced as *input*. If the students are not familiar with a new structure totally, we cannot elicit it from them. In this case, creating *context* is necessary to lead the students to the

target structure. For real contexts, the classroom/school is one of the best places provided as comprehensible input for language acquisition. In fact, context and situation are essential to an understanding of language use and real language occurs in real life situations as a result of real information.

2. Highlighting

The second stage of the pyramid is '*highlighting*'. The goal of this stage is to get the students to focus on the *form, meaning* and *use* of the target structure. By highlighting certain features of the elicited example sentences, the teacher can help the students to make *grammatical generalizations*. Once the students have attempted to understand the patterns, the teacher may go on to explain in more detail how the new language structure is formed, what it means and how it is used.

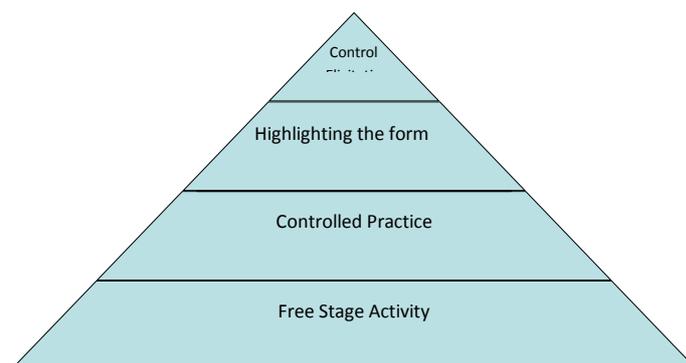
3. Control Practice

The aim of grammar practice is to get students to learn the structures so thoroughly that they will be able to produce them correctly on their own. In spite of getting full marks on grammar exercises, many students make mistakes with the same structures when they are writing. It is because they have neither mastered the structures thoroughly nor acquired them yet. In this case, teachers need to help the students skip over '*form-focused*' accuracy work to *fluent* production by providing a bridge: a variety of practice activities to make them familiar with the structures in context and by giving practice both in *form* and *communicative meaning*. The lessons should include progression of activities that will provide both form and meaning focused practice and that will prepare them for independent use of the target structure.

4. Free Stage Activity

The purpose of the free stage is to give a chance for *natural, meaning-focused use* of the target structure. A student will possibly complete the communicative task correctly without using the structure taught. The focus is mainly on *fluency*. If, however, the teacher finds the students are not using it accurately, then, he/she needs to go back to more controlled practice activities.

These processes of communicative grammar teaching are shown in the following pyramidal approach.



The Communicative Approach to Teaching Grammar [Ur. (1996)]

The Nature of Data and Data Collection

In this study, data was collected by giving tests to 30 Third Year Commerce Students at Yangon Institute of Economics, Yangon. The study was made tangible by collecting data by means of a *pre-test, pilot teaching, post-test* design in order to investigate whether the communicative approach to teaching types of sentences would facilitate their use of grammar in real life situation. This was measured by scores of individuals obtained from each sort of the test in both pre-test and post-test. The same test was indeed administered twice before and after the pilot teaching so that there would not be any variations in managing the test. The subjects were given three various kinds test: Test A, B and C using different types of text. Test A was *'identifying types of sentences in a given short paragraph'*; Test B dealt with *'sentence completion using phrases or clauses'* and Test C concerns about *'transformation of different types'*, that is, *'changing simple sentences to compound sentences or complex sentences and vice versa.'* After the subjects were given the pre-test, the experiment was started teaching types of English sentences using communicative method for six weeks, altogether 20 hours in the classroom. Each lesson followed the *three stage procedure: elicitation, highlighting and practice* (controlled and free). At the elicitation stage, the subjects were introduced with one type of sentence like 'a simple sentence' selected for conscious learning by creating the real situation to help them elicit from it. Then, by highlighting the form of the elicited example sentences like only one 'finite verb' included in a simple sentence to help the subjects make grammatical generalization at the highest possible level. After that, they were given grammar exercises as controlled practice and finally they were given high-controlled or free-stage fluency-focused activities. Thus, making the subjects familiarize with the types of sentences (simple, compound, complex and multiple), giving practice activities both in *form* and *communicative meaning* is the process of grammar teaching. During the treatment, subjects were asked to pay a particular attention to certain features of types of sentences while doing the activities.

Problems that Myanmar Learners Encountered

To find out the difficulties that Myanmar EFL learners encountered while doing practice activities for ‘types of sentences’, altogether three sorts of tests were given to 30 subjects. The results of Test A express that subjects were weak in recognizing particular types of sentences. Besides, they seemed to get confused about multiple structures like ‘*compound – complex*’, ‘*complex – complex*’, etc. Test B indicates that they were not aware of how to complete the sentences by using *phrases* or *clauses*. That means they did not master the two kinds of conjunctions and their meanings. Their performance in Test C also shows that they failed to change one type of sentence into another as they did not recognize the particular features of the forms of sentences for each type; they might not be able to write well-formed grammatical sentences. Therefore, in the next section, features of various types of sentences are analysed.

Features of Types of English Sentences

The features found in the types of sentences are shown in the following table:

	Sentence Type	Examples	Features
1.	Simple	1. She likes music 2. My watch was stolen.	One main clause with only one finite verb
2.	Compound	1. He picked up the phone and answered. 2. Hurry up or you will be late.	Two or more clauses linked together -coordinated using coordinating conjunctions e.g ‘and, or, but, either...or’, etc
3.	Complex	1. When she arrived home, it started to rain. 2. The man who is my neighbour is going to Japan soon. 3. He hopes he will pass the exam.	A main clause with one or more subordinating clauses – subordinated using subordinating conjunctions e.g ‘when, if,etc’ as adverb clause, <i>noun clause</i> or <i>adjective clause</i>
4.	Multiple	1. Though he was ill, he did homework and studied the lessons. 2. What I said was what I meant.	Complex – compound Complex - complex

Adverbial clauses that take certain subordinators are shown in the following table.

	Adverbial clause	Subordinators
1.	of time	before, after, when, while, as, since, until
2.	of place	where, wherever
3.	of manner	as, as if , as though, like
4.	of reason / cause	because, since, for, as, that
5.	of purpose	so that, in order that, lest, that
6.	of result / consequence	that, so....that, such.....that, so
7.	of concession	though, although, even though, whereas
8.	of condition	if, unless, whether, even if, provided, in case

	Adverbial clause	Subordinators
9.	of comparison	than, as.....as, so.....as
10.	of contrast	whereas , while, whilst
11.	of preference	rather....than
12.	of exception	except, save that excepting that

If much attention is paid to the above tables especially the features, they will find it easy to learn various types of sentences and learning different subordinators or linking words will facilitate their skill in using that particular area of grammar.

Results and Discussion

To find out the scores of the pre-tests and post-tests of A, B, C and total of same subjects, the paired comparison **t-test** using **SPSS** software was conducted to compare the means of pre-tests and post-tests. The mean scores of pre-test A is 12.07 with standard deviation 1.929 and the mean scores of post-test A is 13.73 with standard deviation 2.363. The significant level is 0.05 with paired comparison **t** value = -4.475 (Table 1) and it could be said that the post-test A score is significantly different from that of the pre-test A. The mean scores of pre-test B is 9.53 with standard deviation 2.0957 and the mean scores of post-test B is 10.77 with standard deviation 2.176. The significant level is 0.05 with paired comparison **t** value = -7.2 23 (Table 2) and it could be said that the post-test B score is significantly different from that of the pre-test B score. The mean scores of pre-test C is 6.77 with standard deviation 2.661 and the mean scores of post-test C is 8.13 with standard deviation 2.583. The significant level is 0.05 with paired comparison **t** value = -10.420 (Table 3) and it could be said that the post-test C score is significantly different from that of the pre-test C score. The mean scores of pre-test total is 28.37 with standard deviation 6.239 and the mean scores of post-test total is 32.63 with standard deviation 5.863. The significant level is 0.05 with paired comparison **t** value = -9.384 (Table 4) and it could be said that the post-test total score is significantly different from that of the pre-test total score.

Table 1. Comparison between the pre-test A and post-test A scores

Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Pre test A	30	12.07	1.929	0.352
Post test A	30	13.73	2.363	0.431

Paired comparison test between the pre-test A and post-test A scores

Pair comparison test

t	d.f	Mean Differences	Sig.(2-tailed)
-4.475	29	-1.667	0.000

Table 2. Comparison between the pre-test B and post-test B scores

Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Pre test B	30	9.53	2.097	0.383
Post test B	30	10.77	2.176	0.397

Paired comparison test between the pre-test B and post-test B scores

Pair comparison test			
t	d.f	Mean Differences	Sig.(2-tailed)
-7.223	29	-1.233	0.000

Table 3. Comparison between the pre-test C and post-test C scores

Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Pre test C	30	6.77	2.661	0.486
Post test C	30	8.13	2.583	0.472

Paired comparison test between the pre-test C and post-test C scores

Pair comparison test

t	d.f	Mean Differences	Sig.(2-tailed)
-10.420	29	-1.367	0.000

Table 4. Comparison between the pre-test total and post-test total scores

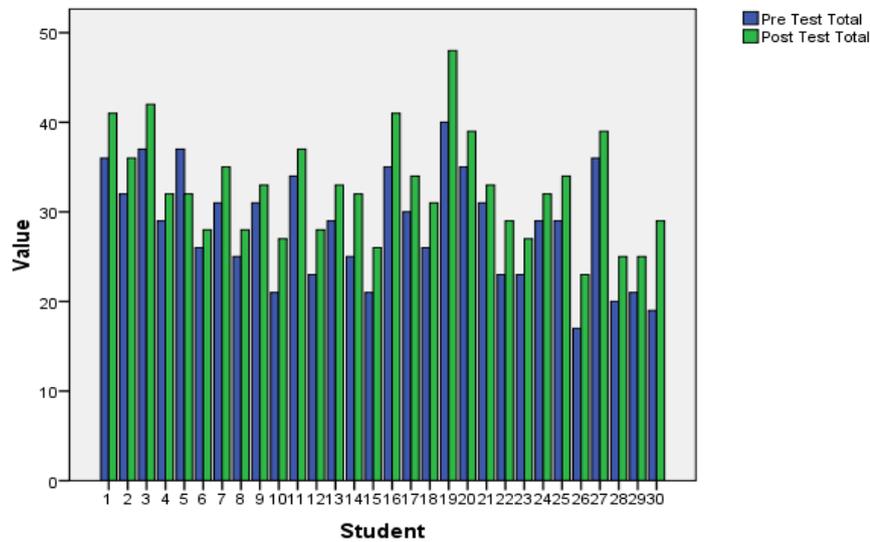
Test	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Pre test Total	30	28.37	6.239	1.139
Post test Total	30	32.63	5.863	1.070

Paired comparison test between the pre-test total and post-test total scores

Pair comparison test			
t	d.f	Mean Differences	Sig.(2-tailed)
-9.384	29	-4.267	0.000

The results of the current study suggest that the new teaching method seems to have some effects on the students. The scores of pre-test and post-test can be compared by means of bar graph like this:

Figure 1: Pre test total and post test total scores



A comparison between the total pre-test scores and post-test scores

The results of the current study suggest that six week treatment seems to have some effects on the skill of their use of various types of sentences. Most of the subjects could identify whether they are 'simple' or 'compound' or 'complex' sentences in the paragraph given after taking six week treatment; so they got significant increased scores for Test A.

It is generally assumed that subjects would be able to complete a few sentences using phrases or clauses to make 'simple', 'compound' or 'complex' sentences using phrases or clauses for Test B. However, they were still weak in doing 'sentence completion' exercises owing to the lack of ideas of how to complete the parts of the sentences given at the starts of each sentence. It may be because they were not aware of the meanings of conjunctions that were to be used to make phrases or clauses in contexts.

It was found that the subjects improved only a little in changing one type of a sentence to another in Test C. They seemed to find the exercises easier to change *compound sentences* or *complex sentences* to *simple sentences* rather than *simple* to *compound* or *complex sentences*. One possible reason could be that they did not recognize the particular features in each type of the sentences due to the lack of the knowledge of condensing and expanding sentences using phrases and clauses.

On the whole, the results of the present study show that they have improved their skill of using grammar: *'simple'*, *'compound'* and *'complex'* sentences accurately. However, to be proficient users of that particular area of grammar, the subjects need some time in which a lot of grammar practice in real situations is being exposed to. Therefore, it is believed that if they are motivated and exposed to learning grammar followed by exercises in real contexts other than unrelated separate sentences regardless of particular situations, their skills of using grammar which lead to proficient writing paragraphs, essays, articles, etc. will improve a lot in the long run.

Pedagogic Implications and Suggestions

The achievements of the students in the study have a lot of implications for communicative approach to teaching grammar focusing on that specific area: types of sentences in EFL situations. It is implied that most students need activities which are exciting, challenging and stimulating their curiosity. If they have a chance of getting involved in something active, they can gradually become a proficient user of grammar. The results of this survey show that most of the students are still weak in writing well-formed grammatical sentences in various types though they are aware of the features included in each type of the sentences. Consequently, useful implications can be drawn for evaluation of teaching grammar in the curriculum at the university level. Since grammar is a key and basic role to carry on learning listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, teachers have the responsibilities to help students improve their proficient levels of using grammar in their writing things as a basis.

The following are suggested for the development of teaching grammar in EFL situations:

- eliciting learners before introducing a new structure in order to arouse their interests
- giving finely-tuned input of the language structure to make them learn consciously
- creating contexts and situations to make them understand the language use
- putting emphasis on highlighting the form, meaning and use of the target structure to help them construct their own structures that are grammatically correct
- making students have a lot of grammar practice which is interesting, challenging and enjoyable in authentic situations.
- changing syllabuses on grammar exercises based on meaningful and interesting context at the tertiary level

Therefore, it is necessary to change trends in teaching grammar that can really upgrade the students' proficient levels of other skills. Since grammar is a necessity for all students to learn grammar accurately and proficiently at all levels, a communicative approach to teaching grammar followed by a lot of grammar practice in meaningful contexts is recommended in the courses at the basic and higher education levels. Moreover, it is recommended that English language teachers should be equipped with effective methodology for teaching grammar: a communicative approach to teaching grammar.

Conclusion

In Myanmar, most of the students learn grammar for the purpose of just doing grammar exercises correctly regardless of putting the rules of grammar into practice in real situations. As a result, they cannot memorize the rules and grammar features in each particular area of grammar in the long run, and thus they make mistakes while writing things and thus they become inefficient users of grammar.

To prove the hypothesis 'if learners are exposed to forms of different particular structures and are trained how to apply grammar rules in real situations, they will be able to cope with that specific area of grammar efficiently and accurately', a group of 30 students specializing in Commerce were given the pre-test and their results were analysed. It was found that most learners failed to recognize the forms of each sentence type and could not write correct sentences in different types, too. Therefore, a treatment of six weeks was given to the experimental group and then the post-test was assigned to that group with the same kinds of text and the results were compared. The results show that the post-test scores of most of the students are higher than those of pre-test and it was found that a communicative approach to teaching *simple*, *compound* and *complex* sentences has some effect on the students' use of grammar efficiently.

Though it is not possible to generalize the findings for any learners with different levels of language proficiency, the results show that learners can benefit a lot if the same method is used for a longer period of time. Apparently, it can be claimed that a communicative method of teaching grammar helps the learners in using particular areas of grammar accurately, fluently and appropriately in real life situations.

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