

DEH09872

Teaching compound verbs in second language learning using grammar-translation method

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Abstract: Although grammar-translation method has been disqualified by most recent scholars and although audio-lingual and communicative methods are backed up by many of people involved in teaching second languages, it still seems that the former method is applicable at least for some specific purposes in teaching a second language. In this study, the grammar-translation method has been used to teach compound verbs in Persian (an Indo-European language) to English speaker students. Compound verbs in Persian are like idioms in which the meaning of single components is different from the meaning of the whole verb. Learning the meaning of these verbs is always a challenging task for Persian learners. In this study, two different lists of compound verbs were prepared. One list was taught by using the current communicative and audio-lingual methods where the verbs were taught as a whole without telling about single components' meaning. The other list was taught by using literal translation of the verbs. That is, for each verb, first the meaning of its components and then the verb as a whole were taught to the students. The results showed that using the latter method helps the students learn the verbs faster and maintaining the meaning of the verbs is longer than in the other methods. That is, when the learners know about the meaning of the components of the verb, they learn the meaning of the whole verb faster and easier.

Introduction:

The word 'grammar' has different meanings for different people, and linguists see it as the way of describing the syntactic and structural systems of the language. (Arndt, et al 2000a:98).

One useful way of using different approaches in teaching language is to bring them together under the pedagogical grammar. Pedagogical grammar can be limited to one or two approaches or be a combination of different approaches to grammar. (Arndt, et al. 2000:113-117). Pedagogical grammar is the knowledge of grammar, which the teacher needs to have and to transfer it to the students (Derewianka, 2001:241).

To understand language, we need to know about Pragmatics, Semantics, Discourse, Syntax, Morphology and Phonology as well. Having subconscious knowledge of all these enables the native speaker to understand a specific language. However, a non-native speaker should learn these to be able to understand it. That is why, teaching grammar is very important in LOTE situations. As Thornbury (1997:5) says, language teachers should be able to know about the language structure and grammar. This will help them to teach the language consciously. If they are teaching LOTE, they also need to know about the structure of the target language as well. So language awareness helps us as a teacher to know about the structure of the language and teach it more efficiently and logically (Dehghani, 2002, 2006).

Background

In the 1970's, interest in the teaching of language has increased as scholars have become more and more interested in the language used in various social and cultural settings. As a result, there has been a rapid shift of research and practice from audio-lingual and grammar translation methods to the exploration of communicative language teaching.

However, some still defend the former method. Savignon (2002) argues that "communication can not take place in the absence of structure, or grammar, a set of shared assumptions about how language works...." (P. 7). Canale and Swain (1980) also, included grammatical competence into their model of communicative competence. They did not suggest that grammar was unimportant. They sought rather to situate grammatical competence within a more broadly defined communicative competence.

Although functional grammar does see the rules as the starting point for analysis (Arndt, 2000:100), to use formal analyzing in language teaching is very important. Functional grammar is comprehensive in analyzing texts and situations but does not serve the purpose of teaching for learners of a second language, as much as a pedagogical grammar. It mostly focuses on psychological aspects of meaning in the language, and it says that we do not need to analyze meaning separately.

Eckhard (1991) claimed that In foreign-language pedagogy, contrastive analysis can be used to help prevent errors.

Teaching grammatical rules helps students to retain the language in a long term by reconstructing the structure. On the other hand, teaching language via rote learning

methods prepare the learners for a short period of time to communicate in the language, and after a while they lose the ability to recall the sentences and the structure.

Some studies propose a comparative framework for teaching a second language. It is argued that a contrastive approach emphasizing the similarities and differences between the native and second language could prevent most of the errors.

However, as Mitchell (2000) suggests, it is impossible to teach whole the grammar of the target language explicitly, and we should try to select and prioritise the important parts of it. That is why in teaching the language we just introduce those parts which are different from the first language ones. When, the students know these differences, it is easier for them to learn a structure which is different from their native language.

Tat'yana (1990) conducted a study of the didactic value of translation as an activity in teaching Russian as a second language to Bulgarian students. Translation was used as a means of enhancing students' acquisition of spontaneous speech and an approach to the remediation of second-language errors. In this study, literal translation was considered as one of the approaches for pedagogical practice in second-language instruction.

Objective: Persian has a huge number of compound verbs which are formed by a noun and a simple verb or an adjective and a simple verb. One way of teaching these compound verbs is to analyse the meaning of its components first and then to introduce the meaning of the whole verb.

The other method is teaching the meaning of the verb as a whole without talking about the meaning of the components. For example, the verb ‘derāz keš’ ‘to lie down’ is formed of two words. The first word is an adjective, derāz (long), and the second word is a simple verb, keš (to pull). Thus, this verb literally means ‘to pull long’ but the real meaning is ‘to lie down’.

Hypotheses: In this study, the aim was to find out whether teaching these compound verbs in isolation is better than teaching them as a whole.

Subjects: the subjects were adult native English speakers, employed in the Australian Defence Force of Australia. They learned Persian (Dari) as a second language. ¹

Persian is an Iranian language which is a subgroup of the Indo European languages. Persian has three main dialects: Farsi in Iran, Tjikiki in Tajikistan and Dari in Afghanistan¹

	List A		
Number	Compound verb	Literal translation	meaning
1	Be kār bar	To take to work	To use
2	pā bāz kon	To open leg	To welcome
3	Sarmā xor	To eat cold	To catch a cold
4	az beyn bar	To take from between	To destroy
5	Piyāde šav	To become on foot	To get off
6	Savār šav	To become on board	To get on
7	Be ta ³ xir oft	To fall in delay	To delay
8	Az dast dah	To give from hand	To lose

9	As sar gir	To grasp from the head	To restart
10	Bar pä šav	To become on foot	To be held
11	Yäd där	To have memory	To remember
12	Dars dah	To give lesson	To teach
13	Läzem där	To have necessity	To need
14	Nešän dah	To give sign	To show
15	Harekat kon	To do movement	To depart
16	Sabr kon	To do patience	To wait
17	Piyäde šav	To become on foot	To get off
18	Pul dah	To give money	To pay
19	Peydä kon	To do obvious	To find
20	Mesväk zan	To hit brush	To brush teeth
List B			
Number	Compound verb	Literal translation	meaning
1	Deräz keš	To pull long	Lie down
2	Xoš gozar	To pass joy	To enjoy
3	Zang zan	To hit the bell	To ring
4	Nafas keš	To pull the breath	To breath
5	Där zan	To hit the gallows	To hang
6	Bälä rav	To go up	To climb
7	Čang zan	To hit paw	To grasp
8	Dalil ävar	To bring reason	To argue

The students were in the age range of 25 to 35. They attended a one year intensive language course where they were supposed to reach an intermediate level of proficiency in Persian, and to be able to communicate effectively with native speakers.

The course was very intensive. It ran for 46 weeks and five days a week. Each day consisted of 6 periods including listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Methodology: To find out which method is better to teach the compound verbs, two separate lists of Persian compound verbs were prepared. Each list included 20 compound verbs. The verbs in List A were taught as a whole and the verbs in List B were taught in

9	Deltang šav	To become tight heart	To miss
10	Edäme dār	To have extension	To continue
11	Furud äy	To come to descending	To land
12	Fešär dah	To give pressure	To push
13	Gul zan	To hit a trick	To deceive
14	Guš dah	To give ear	To listen
15	Jä oft	To fall in place	To settle
16	Jän dah	To give soul	To die
17	Lazzat bar	To take joy	To enjoy
18	Ozr xäh	To ask for an excuse	To apologize
19	Ruberu šav	To become face to face	To confront
20	Yäd gir	To get memory	To learn

isolation, using literal translation. The time frame was two weeks. After two months the students were tested in vocabulary to find out whether they have learned the verb in isolation better than leaning them as a whole or not. The lists of the verbs in both groups are included in the footnote

As the students were supposed to learn 30 new words each day, they were able to learn these verbs within two weeks. After two weeks they were tested on how much they learned from each list. The test was a vocabulary test where they were given the list of the verbs to write their English equivalent. The tests were marked and then the results were analyzed to test the hypothesis.

Results:

The results for the six students who participated in this study were as follow for the list

A:

Nicholass	60/100
Simon	70/100
Tennile	85/100
John	70/100
George	55/100
Steven	75/100

The average mark was 69.16 for this group of compound verbs.

For the list B, the results were as follow:

Nicholass	75/100
Simon	85/100
Tennile	95/100
John	80/100
George	70/100
Steven	80/100

The average mark was 80.83 for this group.

Conclusion:

The result of the tests showed a difference between learning the verbs in isolation and as a whole. When the compound verbs were introduced by a literal translation, they were learned and retrieved better than in learning them as a whole.

Although this sample is small but it can suggest the preference by the students in learning the verbs in isolation and thus, it can lead one to claim that Grammar-Translation method is still a beneficial method in teaching foreign languages. However, to substantiate this claim, future studies in larger scales are needed.

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