THE EFFECT OF DISPLAY OF FIXED GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This investigation assessed the relative effectiveness of two methods of teaching fixed items of English grammar to junior and senior high school students taking an intensive language course in English as a second language.

The method for the experimental group gave preference to the cognitive-code approach. Students were taught three items of fixed grammar deductively by means of a kinesthetic-visual card model and various oral drills. The grammar items were mechanically displayed and manipulated in order to establish a conscious awareness of grammar before oral drills were begun.

The method for the control group gave preference to audio-lingual methodology. Grammar items were taught inductively with only a little time allowed for illustration of grammar.

Pre-tests and post-tests were given to determine learning for each item of grammar. The t-test was used to measure transfer ability. The analysis of covariance was used to determine the effects the treatment conditions had on the learning of three items of fixed grammar.

From the analyses of the data the investigator found that the kinesthetic-visual card model used with the experimental group, was statistically significant for two of the three items of grammar tested. Transfer was found to be statistically significant for one of the three items of grammar tested.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		Page
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY	1
	STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	4
	PROCEDURE OF THE STUDY	5
	DEFINITION OF TERMS USED	6
	DELIMITATIONS	6
	LIMITATIONS	7
II.	REVIEW OF LITERATURE	8
	Review of Teaching Methodologies and Approaches	8
	Grammar rule and Translation Method	8
	Oral-direct Method	10
	Situational Approach	10
	Basic English	11
	Reading Method	11
	The Structural Method	11
	The Transformational-generative Approach	14
	The Cognitive-code Approach	15
	Synthesis of Methodologies	16
	Is there a Superior Method?	16
	Conclusions	18
	Grammar	19
	Latin Based	19

CHAPTER Page

An English Base 19

Complexity of English Grammar 20

Categories of Grammar 21

Conclusions 21

Productive Techniques 22

Importance of Display 22

Characteristics of a Good Visual 23

Effectiveness of Visuals Questioned 23

Other Modes of Presentation 24

Reading and Writing 24

Conclusions 26

Problems Anticipated 27

III. RESEARCH PROCEDURES 29

Theoretical Framework of the Investigation 29

The Instrument 30

The Sample 31

The Setting 31

The Facilities 31

The Basic Design 31

Procedures of the Investigation 32

Item one - the verb "to be" 32

Pre-test for the verb "to be" 33

Structure Lesson on verb "to be" 34

Item Two - verbs in the Simple Present Tense 36

Structure Lesson for the Experimental Group 36

CHAPTER Page

Structure Lesson for the Control Group 38

Procedure for the Transfer Test 39

Item Three - Regular verbs in the Simple Past Tense . . 39

Structure Lesson for the Experimental Group 40

Structure Lesson for the Control Group 41

Item Four - Irregular verbs in the Simple Past Tense . . 41

Structure Lesson for the Experimental Group 42

Structure Lesson for the Control Group 43

Statistical Treatment of Data 43

Necessary Modification in Sample and Procedure 44

IV. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA 46

Comparison of Treatment Effects on Final Measures . . . 46

Presentation and Analysis of Data 48

Tables for the Analysis of Covariance 48

Tables for t-test 58

A Discussion of the Findings 60

Oral and Written Language Acquisition 60

Transfer Ability 61

Test for Homogeneity of Variance 61

Test for Homogeneity of Regression 61

Significant features of the Investigation 61

V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS 65

Summary 65

Findings 66

Conclusions 67

CHAPTER Page

Suggestions for Further Research 68

Suggestions for Curriculum 68

Specific Suggestions 68

General Suggestions 68

BIBLIOGRAPLY 71

APPENDICES . . . . . .

Appendix A . . . . . .

Appendix B . . . . . .

Appendix C . . . . . .

Appendix D . . . . . .

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		PAGE
4:01	Summary Tables for Oral Tests on Verbs in the Simple Present Tense	49
4:02	Summary Tables for Oral Tests on Regular Verbs in the Simple Past Tense	50
4:03	Summary Tables for Oral Tests on Irregular Verbs in the Simple Past Tense	51
4:04	Summary Tables for Written Tests on Verbs in the Simple Present Tense	52
4:05	Summary Tables for Written Tests on Regular Verbs in the Simple Past Tense	53
4:06	Summary Tables for Written Tests on Irregular Verbs in the Simple Past Tense	54
4:07	Summary Tables for Oral Tests on Verbs in the Simple Present, and Regular and Irregular Verbs in the Simple Past Tense	55
4:08	Summary Tables for Written Tests on Verbs in the Simple Present, and Regular and Irregular Verbs in the Simple Past Tense	56
4:09	Summary Tables for Oral and Written Tests on Verbs in the Simple Present and Regular and Irregular Verbs in the Simple Past	57
4:10	Analysis of Mean Differences for Transfer Test for Verbs in the Simple Present Tense	58
4:11	Analysis of Mean Differences For Transfer Test on Regular Verbs in the Simple Past	59
4.12	Analysis of Mean Differences for Transfer Tests for Irregular Verbs in the Simple Past Tense	59
5:13	Summary of Significance Levels	66
5:14	Summary of Values for T on Transfer Tests	67

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

J.B. Carroll (1966) stated that an examination of practices of foreign language teachers and several theorists showed that there were only two major theories of learning commonly used today, the audio-lingual habit theory and the cognitive code-learning theory, and both of them failed to take account of recent findings in verbal learning.

Large scale studies on comparing methods, as reported by Carroll (1966), Chastain (1968), and Olsson (1973) did little to make classroom instruction effective since they could seldom find significant differences between methods.

There is a need for small scale investigations on methods and techniques for teaching specific limited objectives based on current theory and methodology with the aim of making classroom instruction more effective and productive.

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

A review of current theoretical literature indicated that the role of grammar for teaching the structure of language could be divided into three main schools of thought: one "rejects grammar as a codification of reality, and therefore sees it as unnatural and almost reprehensible" (Kelly 1971), a second accepted grammar with inductive teaching methods and

behaviourist learning theory, and a third school accepted grammar with deductive teaching methods and saw explanation and isolation of critical elements as a complement to man's cognitive learning process.

Each school of thought had its advocates. Pattison (1971) was opposed to the use of grammar. He had strong feelings about courses which isolated and itemized language skills and features of language. He saw no point "in evaluating a course that has required of the learners only substitution of items in frames or manipulation of structures, because that is not language". Teaching must go after the total meaning without resorting to fragmentation.

Kelly (1971) stated that Palmer and Guerry accepted grammar "as a useful crutch with which to order knowledge already gained by active methods". Further Kelly (1971) stated that Palmer is responsible for introducing pattern practice, an inductive method, for teaching the structure of language into English. Other writers like Lado (1964) and Fries (1952) gave differing yet convincing justification for pattern practice and behaviourist theory and did much to popularize the structural method and its highly developed drill technique for teaching grammar awareness inductively.

The theory and methods of the structuralists have been given pride of place by many theorists, publishers, and in the second language classroom, it is an almost unchallenged approach. Kreidler (1971) claimed that since the 1950's the structural method has dominated second language teaching and drill has become the most important and time consuming activity in the classroom. Publishers of materials and textbooks like, English Sentence Patterns (1958) by Lado and Contemporary Spoken English (1967) from the Institute of Modern Languages, Washington, D.C., have limited themselves almost entirely to the structuralist school of thought.

Robert Allen (1972) is a writer who accepted and used grammar even in the early stages of language learning. He said, "In learning a foreign language, it is more important initially to learn the signals of grammatical meaning than to learn the lexical items." The way to learn the signals is by consciously focusing on the structural elements that carry meaning, and then immediately applying the knowledge to free sentence generation. Allen (1972) suggested the use of nonsense words and drills as a useful technique for focusing on relevant structural features.

Many writers did not fall clearly into one of the three schools of thought mentioned. Wilga Rivers (1964) did not see much of a problem in teaching grammatical awareness. Grammar was either too simple or too complex for formal lesson structuring. Rivers (1964) said:

> There are certain fixed elements of language which operate as closed systems. These elements are skill type and require little intellectual analysis. These elements are inflection of person and number, agreement of gender, fixed forms of interogation or negation and the formal features of tenses . . . For these features drill is a very effective technique. They may be inductively learned by the students without more than an occasional word of explanation by the teacher when there is hesitation or bewilderment. In structured classroom practice their use may be extended by the process of analogy, to other utterances with different combinations of lexical items.

The investigator questioned the adequacy of drills and occasional words of explanation as an effective technique for teaching the structure of language because of the great amount of time and energy needed to acquire grammatical awareness. Furthermore, since research on comparative methodology has not found a superior method, the investigator felt that many theorists and publishers have adopted a biased view on the contributions formal grammar could have on language learning. The conventional approach of drilling to teach structure has been so over-emphasized as to restrict

the development and distribution of other approaches leaving the classroom teacher with little choice but to drill.

There is a need for new and alternate ways of teaching the structure of language that is based on a review of theoretical literature of all three schools of thought and not restricted to any limiting views of grammar. Any new approach should be tested in a teaching situation to see if it can reduce time and energy and yet remain productive.

The investigator has developed a kinesthetic-visual card model for communicating non-verbally specific grammatical features. The card model was designed to display:

1. The critical features in the structure of simple affirmative, negative and interrogative statements using pronouns and

   (i) verb "to be" in the simple present tense
   (ii) verbs in simple present tense
   (iii) regular verbs in simple past tense
   (iv) irregular verbs in simple past tense

2. The answering technique using both negative and affirmative structures.

3. The nature of contractions.

The kinesthetic-visual card model was tested in a teaching environment. It was anticipated that multi-sensory experience with structure would aid conceptualization of grammar, reduce drill time, aid memory, and build confidence in handling structures. Specifically the investigation attempted to discover if the kinesthetic-visual approach had a significant effect on language acquisition and transfer ability.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This investigation attempted to evaluate the effectiveness of a kinesthetic-visual card model for teaching fixed grammatical patterns of

English. The investigation was designed to answer the following questions:

1. Does the kinesthetic-visual card model significantly aid oral and written language acquisition?

2. Does the kinesthetic-visual card model significantly aid subjects to acquire transfer ability?

PROCEDURE OF THE STUDY

In order to acquaint all the subjects with the kinesthetic-visual card model and the testing procedure used in the investigation, the following procedures were followed:

1. Introductory lessons were taught.
2. Oral and written pre-tests were administered.
3. Structure lesson with cards was taught on the verb "to be".
4. Oral and written post-tests were administered.

The same procedures were followed for each new grammar item as it was introduced. After the pre-test, the subjects were randomly assigned to two groups. On the day following the pre-tests, one group was taught a new grammar item using the card sets and the other group was taught the same point of grammar in the same amount of time but without the use of the cards. After the two lessons, the pre-test was restructured and administered as a post-test to measure learning for each item of grammar taught. A transfer test was given after the post-tests.

An analysis of covariance was used to determine the effects the independent variable, the card sets, had upon the learning of each item of grammar. A t-test was used to determine the effects of the cards on transfer ability of the subjects.

All oral parts of the test were recorded and checked against the

scores given at the time of the recording during the experiment.

Since all the subjects received the same lessons, there was no restriction placed on the vocabulary or the number of positive structures introduced. The lesson outlines in the appendix were considered minimum for participation in the experiment.

Since students differ in their ability to learn from any one method and since good teaching requires various methods of presentation, a level of significance of .20 was accepted as significant for the covariance analysis and .10 for the t-tests.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Kinesthetic-visual card model. This term refers to a method of teaching certain fixed elements of grammar with cards that feature words and inflectional endings.

Fixed grammar. This refers to grammar that is rule bound. In this investigation it refers specifically to the fixed forms of interrogation and negation, and the formal features of tenses.

DELIMITATIONS

This investigation involved twenty-five junior and senior high school students in an intensive language course at Daniel McIntyre Collegiate. The students were taught only three items of fixed grammar in three short time blocks (one item per time block). The number of grammatical items was deliberately restricted and the time for each lesson was shortened to a

minimum time required for the experimental group, in order to permit; (i) uniform lesson input, (ii) diagnostic testing of each grammar item, (iii) learning without confusion from too many learning items, and (iv) for lessening the impact of any uncontrollable variables.

It was recognized that it is not possible to control the technique a student adopts for learning; therefore, a week was allowed between structure lessons so that exposure to the cards in the experimental group would be sufficiently distant so as not to influence the learning technique used by the student when he was in the control group. It was anticipated that students who were switching between methods would soon opt for a method suited to their learning style regardless of the method used in the teaching lesson.

Pronunciation was not stressed in this investigation on the assumption that it does not play an important role in the acquisition of syntax.

This investigation was not a cognitive-code versus audio-lingual experiment. No attempt has been made to differentiate the methods compared as explicitly cognitive-code and audio-lingual. The experiment group was taught by a method which gave preference to a cognitive-code approach and the control group was taught by a method which gave preference to the audio-lingual method.

LIMITATIONS

The sample for the investigation was limited by the space available for new students and by the actual number of students who had little or no knowledge of English, that were placed in the available space in the Basic English class of Daniel McIntyre Collegiate.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This investigation emanates from the need for developing an approach to teaching grammar that is pedagogically realistic. The review of literature examines (i) various methodologies and approaches to teaching grammar, (ii) the domain of grammar suitable for formal teaching, (iii) methodological studies, and (iv) productive learning techniques with the objective of giving a methodological rationale for the kinesthetic-visual card model assessed in this investigation.

I. REVIEW OF TEACHING METHODOLOGIES AND APPROACHES

Grammar rule and translation method. Grammar lessons dominated language teaching before the advent of Modern Linguistic Science which began approximately with Grimm's Germanic Grammar (1821). For centuries Latin and Greek were taught almost exclusively by a grammar rule and translation method. Even in recent times the grammar approach had a large following in spite of the strong attacks made on it by modern linguistic scholarship. Scholars of Latin and Greek worked toward perfection in speaking and writing and it was thought that this could only be accomplished through the highest possible expertise in the form of the language. The rigorous application of grammar rules to writing and speaking as practiced in the grammar method was well suited to developing expertise in form.